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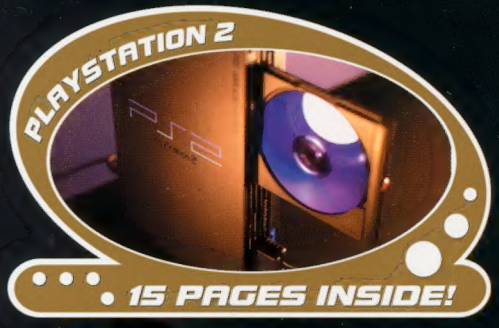
INTERVIEWS WITH YU SUZUKI, ODDWORLD, GENKI, & ACTIVISION

Gamers' Republic

ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE



WE GO COMPLETELY MENTAL WITH KALISTO'S

NIGHTMARE CREATURES 2

FOR DREAMCAST AND PLAYSTATION

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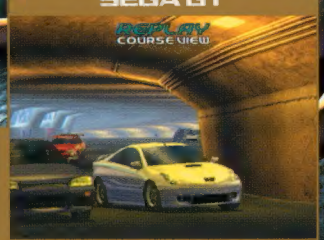

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gamers' Republic MANIFESTO

The other shoe has finally dropped. And while it's Shaq-sized, I don't think it's the death-dealing blow to the Dreamcast that so many (too many) so-called industry professionals predicted it would be. The problem with that theory lies in the very notion that Sega ever intended to be as big as Sony or had adopted a similar business plan in the first place. The PlayStation 2 is now the most powerful game machine on the planet, yes, but it also plays DVDs and has a PC card port onboard, ready to receive an array of future applications. Sony's goals are different from Sega's, or Nintendo's for that matter. It's global domination they're after—and they'll most likely get it. The PS2 and forthcoming X-Box are being marketed as home entertainment components, while the Dreamcast and Dolphin will likely carry on their respective bloodlines as pure gaming platforms. It's my belief that Sony and Microsoft will now vie for supremacy in the new frontier of multimedia–the fight for the living room–while Nintendo and Sega will poetically go back to fighting it out for the die- hard gamers of the world (who will, of course, own all four consoles anyway). But who cares? If they all create great exclusive software and have strategic alliances with top developers, who's going to complain? Game machines are relatively cheap and they're getting cheaper. What someone really needs to come up with is a cool-ass home entertainment center that will house them all, with a switcher built in. I don't think we really need to worry so much about whether four consoles can flourish, but rather that Ubi Soft is developing a game based on *V.I.P.*! Now that's a serious problem. The people who brought us Rayman 2 are now working on a boob-fest based on a cheesy syndicated TV show. Be afraid, be very afraid. What's coming next may make the death of hand-drawn graphics look like a walk in the Twinkle Park. **GR**

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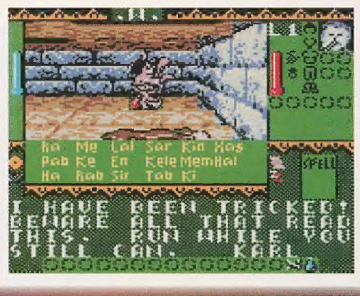

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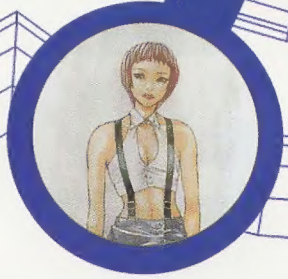
GR VOL. 2 ISSUE # 12

TRANSCONTINENTAL GAMING GUIDE
A MILLENNIUM PROJECT

PS2 .22

After seeming eons of torturous waiting, the PlayStation 2 has finally arrived. Are we thrilled? Is it really that good? Does it live up to the hype? Is it the real deal? How cool are the launch games? What's next?



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NIGHTMARE CREATURES 2 .16

Dreamcast and PlayStation are going to get a lot bloodier with the arrival of Nightmare Creatures 2, a brutal and deliciously twisted game where you, a bandage wrapped madman, get to take an ax and mutilate freakish monsters. Any questions?

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frontlines

GDC: THE SUNDANCE FESTIVAL OF GAMING?

By Michael Puccini

With the worldwide video game artists, programmers, producers and developers converging together, the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Jose, CA, was the place to be in the video game industry the weekend of March 10-12, 2000. Bill Gates announced Microsoft's new game platform, code-named X-Box (see story); Sony's Phil Harrison detailed the company's plans for helping the game development community create titles for PS2 and announced PS2 had reached 1 million unit sales in Japan in a single week; Sega's Yu Suzuki gave a speech on creating reality in epic games and announced Shenmue 2; the game development community saw new software and hardware tools; and Sega and Microsoft co-sponsored and bussed people to one heck of a party at Paramount's Great America amusement park in Santa Clara (see story). Like a lost stepchild, the only missing major element of the industry was Nintendo. The company has a history of holding its cards close to its chest until wanting to show them, but with everything going on at this show, their non-presence was highly noticeable.

Phil Harrison, Sony Computer Entertainment America's vice president of third party relations and research and development, addressed a near full house in a 3,000 seat auditorium and discussed the future of the PlayStation. He outlined business strategies, showcased PS2 graphical capabilities with games like Dark Cloud (being created by Sony) and Onimusha (being created by Capcom), and introduced GR's friends from Naughty Dog, who announced that they are working on a new character-based title for the PS2.

We learned that some of the more interesting aspects of the PS2, which will be unveiled in time, are mobile wireless connections, the downloading of episodic entertainment, and being able to hook up a video camera to the system and use nerf-like peripherals to move objects on the screen (essentially, rudimentary motion capturing, but real-time motion capturing nonetheless).

As its name implies, the GDC still focused on the game development community, and there were nearly 200 different seminars/discussions available for the more than 10,000 attendees, covering topics such as: "Developing Software for Girls," "AI in Sports Games," and "Why Do We Make Violent Games?" Also, not quite on the scale of E3, but far from the GDC of 10 years ago, a three-day booth expo took place from Friday through Sunday. Obviously, the products were mostly new software tools designed to help professionals create games (no new games were shown).

Probably the most interesting and talked about booth at the show was a company called DigiScents, which is trying to add aroma-based hardware and software technology into the gaming industry, so that you can actually smell aromas such as flowers, gunpowder, and, yes, human gas.

On Saturday, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., a GDC tradition took place—the Booth Crawl. At the mini-event, selected booths, spread out across the show floor, offered attendees a variety of libations (no minors or non-industry people are allowed in the show) and snacks to help foster a community spirit.

With the GDC over and E3 just around the corner, I can't help but compare the two shows against each other. It's kind of like the movie industry, with E3 being the Academy Awards and the GDC being the Sundance Festival. And some people think Sundance is better. They may be right.

MIZUGUCHI-SAN SPEAKS AT GDC

Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the manager of Sega Software development team, Division #9, and creator of the unique Dreamcast game Space Channel 5, gave an informative and interesting lecture called "Space Channel 5: A Case Study," to a packed room at the GDC. The game combines Bemani- and Parappa-style music and dancing gameplay with a simple shooting interface.

Although relatively unknown in the U.S. outside of Sega game enthusiasts, Mizuguchi-san is a popular and constantly rising industry celebrity in Japan, having previously created the landmark Sega Rally series of games.

Space Channel 5 was released in Japan in December 1999, and is enjoying great popularity. The game is currently being localized for a U.S. release sometime this summer, and Sega is working with MTV on a major promotion of the game—possibly a real-life version of it...without the shooting.

When asked how and why he came up with the concept for SC5, Mizuguchi-san said, "I wanted to create a game that anybody would be able to play, both male and female." With its catchy songs and basic gaming interface, he has achieved that goal.

ME AND YU AND SHENMUE 2

By Michael Puccini

At the Game Developers Conference in San Jose, CA, Gamers' Republic was granted a one-on-one meeting with Yu Suzuki, Sega's legendary AM2 arcade game designer/producer and the project leader for Shenmue. Here's what he had to say.

GAMERS' REPUBLIC: THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO MEET WITH ME. FIRST OF ALL, ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE SHENMUE GAME SALES IN JAPAN?

Yu Suzuki: I am happy with the current sales, although I would be happier if it was more.

GR: ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE CRITICAL ACCLAIM SHENMUE IS RECEIVING?

YS: I am happy with the good, positive comments we are receiving from our dedicated web site, www.shenmue.com, and the game has also been selected as the best Dreamcast title of the year.

GR: WAS THERE SOMETHING MORE THAT YOU WANTED TO PUT INTO THE GAME BUT DIDN'T HAVE THE TIME TO?

YS: In Shenmue, there is a bar that you go into and there is a pool table that you can play. I would have really liked to make a great, precise, fully realized game of 9-ball.

GR: WHAT DO YOU FEEL ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN CREATING EMOTION IN A GAME?

YS: It's pretty difficult to single-out just one element, but I think that story would have to be one of the most important elements and sound and music and facial expressions and with the facial expressions, the eyes are the most important.

GR: CAN YOU SAY WHAT YOU ARE WORKING ON RIGHT NOW?

YS: Shenmue 2. Also, I'm working on the localization of Shenmue for the U.S. and the European releases.

GR: HAVE YOU SEEN THE PS2 SYSTEM IN ACTION AND WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THAT SYSTEM, IF ANY?

YS: I've seen it.

GR: ANY IMPRESSIONS?

YS: It's black. [Laughter.]

GR: KIND OF STRAYING AWAY FROM BUSINESS, WHAT HOBBIES DO YOU ENJOY?

YS: I have a lot of hobbies. One of my current favorites is wine-tasting.

GR: DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE AMERICAN BANDS?

YS: Van Halen. I love Van Halen. Especially Eddie Van Halen on guitar. I bought an Eddie Van Halen-model guitar.

GR: WHAT DID YOU THINK OF SAMMY HAGAR LEAVING VAN HALEN?

YS: Not good.

GR: DO YOU THINK THAT ONLINE GAMING WILL EVER GROW TO BE AS POPULAR AS CONSOLE DISC GAMING?

YS: I know that as a business model, determining how to earn money from it is still a big question. As far as inventory is concerned, in the disc model, when a new game comes out, the old games on the shelf are replaced with the new ones. But with online games, the users will be downloading them from a server. New online games will be able to join old online games in a database, in an archived market as opposed to the replacement market. There will be a wider variety of titles for users to choose from. And when users have to choose from hundreds of online games, they will always choose the number one best game. When new games come out, they will always have to be better than the number one game. This is not good for the developers of average and bad games.

GR: I'M SURE YOU'VE HEARD THE RUMOR THAT SEGA IS GETTING OUT OF THE HARDWARE BUSINESS. CAN YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

YS: We've never heard anything like that.

GR: THE SEGA-MICROSOFT RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN GOING SINCE THE DAWN OF THE PLANNING STAGES OF THE DREAMCAST. WILL THAT RELATIONSHIP CONTINUE TO GROW AS THEY ENTER INTO HARDWARE?

YS: I don't know. Sega is a big company and I'm not involved in those kind of issues. But I am on friendly terms with people at Microsoft.

GR: ARE YOU ON FRIENDLY TERMS WITH MIYAMOTO-SAN OF NINTENDO?

YS: I've met him a few times, and only talked to him once or twice. Sega is headquartered in Tokyo and they are headquartered in Kyoto and there is a great distance in between. I think that Miyamoto-san is a very good game creator.

GR: DID YOU PLAY ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME?

YS: I don't really play games. I just love to make them.

X-BOX ANNOUNCED AT GDC

In the electronic entertainment industry, major new product launches are always reserved for the two biggest trade shows:Tokyo Game Show (TGS) and the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). But all that seems to be changing. On March 10, Bill Gates addressed a standing-room-only crowd in a 3,000-seat auditorium at the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Jose, CA, as Microsoft threw its hat into the hardware ring with the official announcement of its gaming hardware, codenamed X-Box.

Regarding the company's foray into the gaming hardware business, Gates, Microsoft chairman and chief software architect, stated, "Building on our strengths as a software company, X-Box will offer game developers a powerful platform and game enthusiasts an incredible experience. We want X-Box to be the platform of choice for the best and most creative game developers in the world."

With a projected launch date of Fall 2001, the X-Box will be the fifth major platform (including PC) vying for gamers dollars in an industry that had only two systems less than ten years ago. As the industry continues to grow at a rapid pace and home consoles begin to converge with the Internet, Microsoft wants to make sure that it's one of the big players in the new revolution.

Whether vaporware or not, on its performance specifications sheet, Microsoft is comparing its system directly to Sony's recently released powerhouse, the amazingly adaptable console PS2. According to the document, although both systems are DVD-compatible, some of the more noticeable figures Microsoft is touting are: an Intel Pentium III processor vs. PS2's 300Mhz MIPS, a 300Mhz custom-designed graphics chip vs. PS2's 150Mhz graphics chip, broadband-integrated vs. PS2's future broadband upgrading, 300 million micropolygons per second vs. PS2's none, and producing 300 million polygons per second vs. PS2's 66 million pps.

Microsoft has already spoken with and received interest from an impressive list of game software companies: Electronic Arts, Konami, Eidos, Namco, Acclaim, Infogrames, Activision, Capcom, Take-Two Interactive, Ubi Soft, THQ, Midway, Koei, and Hasbro Interactive.

Whether the system will actually reach fruition and be a success or will sink like the 3DO hardware is anyone's guess. But we expect to see and hear more about the console from the Microsoft camp come E3 time in May. Stay tuned: it's getting interesting.

HOW MUCH FOR THE WHOLE NIGHT?

By Michael Puccini

With the Dreamcast currently holding the crown in North America with the latest and greatest piece of video game hardware, and Microsoft creating waves at the GDC by announcing their entry into the hardware business, it was no surprise that the two companies celebrated together by combining resources to throw a massive, expensive, private party for the GDC attendees.

The companies rented a small section of the Paramount Great America amusement park in Santa Clara, CA, and the guests were bussed in and treated to free admission, a few complimentary drinks, and allowed unlimited access to two of the park's attractions: the bumper cars and the Top Gun roller coaster. Although the lines for both were long, those patrons who had enough patience to endure the waits, especially the Europeans who may have never experienced an amusement park before, came out all smiles (except those coming off of Top Gun sick).

In the main hall, it was quite the festive scene. In addition to die-hard gamers being able to compete on Dreamcast units with NFL2K and NBA2K, there was a casino for players to win a variety of Dreamcast games, a human bowling ball area, and a dance area with '70s and '80s music from a band called The Cheeseballs. Also, since programmers will be programmers wherever they go, in one of the park's theatres, there was a video game-themed quiz show being played, pitting the U.S. against the world (the U.S. won). I went to check out the show, and was quite surprised at how many seats were filled (I mean, come on—Top Gun the roller coaster!).

EXERCISING A LITTLE CONTROL

By Michael Puccini

InterAct Accessories, the company that brought you the GameShark and a variety of controllers for every system available, is at it again, this time for the PS2. The third-party peripheral company is making efforts to try and construct the ultimate controllers. To do this, they wisely invited a member of each of the top gaming print publications and online sites to a private conference room at (ironically) Sony's entertainment and retail mega-complex, the Metreon in San Francisco. Once there, we took part in a roundtable discussion for input on what makes a good controller and what makes a bad controller. The company is hoping that this feedback will help them create great PS2 controllers right out of the starting blocks.

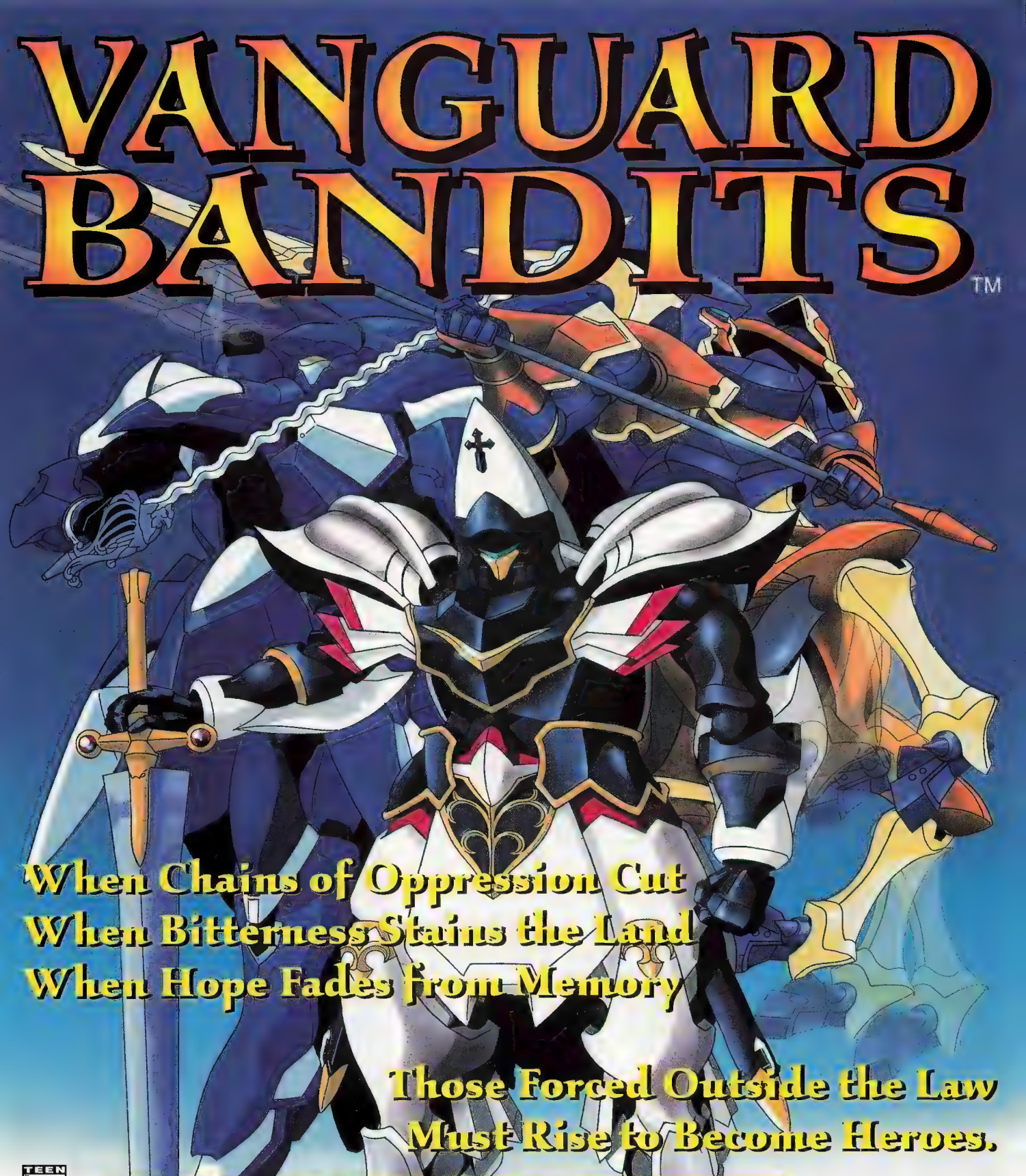
Speaking of being great out of the starting blocks, InterAct had a celebrity join in the proceedings: Maurice Greene, the world's fastest man. Greene is the current world record holder in the 100-meter dash, 60-meter dash, and 50-meter dash; he's the odds-on favorite to win the 100-meter dash, 200-meter dash, and 4x100-meter relay in the Olympic Games this summer in Sydney; and he's the cover figure on Konami's upcoming PlayStation track and field game. He's also a gamer, and a cool guy to hang out with.

Although we all had to sign NDA's and promise we wouldn't reveal what we discussed at the gathering (ooohh, controllers....sssshhhh), Todd Hayes, president and founder of InterAct, and his group were extremely thrilled and interested in all of the comments being tossed about. It was refreshing to see a peripheral company caring enough about their audience to actually have them involved in the process of creation. The company is going to be producing two different PS2 controllers (rumor has it that one may even be called the "Editor's Controller").

IT'S WATCHING

Japanese Dreamcast owners are due to receive the Dreameye this June, a simple, low-cost digital video camera. Able to store up to 30 640x480 images in its internal flash memory, the Dreameye also functions as a basic video capture device, allowing users to send around twenty seconds of compressed video data to other Dreamcast users, who can then save this clip onto a VMU. Most enticingly, the Dreameye can be used as one end of a video phone, transmitting sight and sound through telephone lines or the Internet. Future applications may include face-mapping features for personalized game characters. As of press, Sega of America remains undecided on the Dreameye's future in this country.

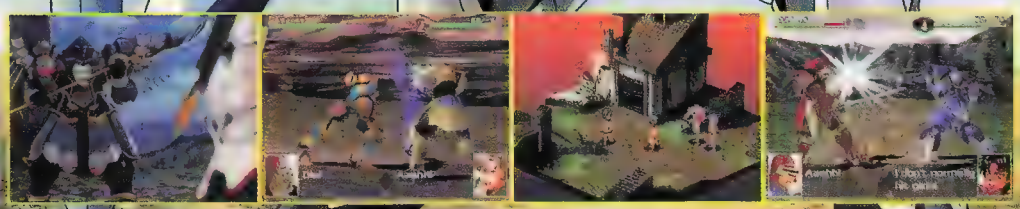
VANGUARD BANDITS™



When Chains of Oppression Cut
When Bitterness Stains the Land
When Hope Fades from Memory

Those Forced Outside the Law
Must Rise to Become Heroes.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



PlayStation

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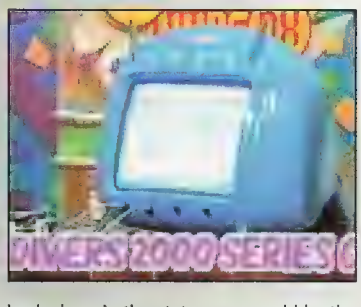
IT CAME IN HIGH HEELS...

In a recent announcement, uber-developer Ubi Soft, makers of the highly regarded Rayman series, announced that in cooperation with Sony Pictures Consumer Products Inc., it will develop (gulp) a game that will feature the star of *VIP*, the gorgeous, the bubbly, the big... hat-wearing, Pamela Anderson Lee. Now *Barbed Wire*...maybe, but *VIP*? I smell a really cheesy Resident Evil clone. The game will cover every format known to man, literally, beside the Neo Pocket this puppy is coming out for everything: the Dreamcast, PC, PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Nintendo 64, Dolphin, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, and the X-Box. I am not joking. "The game is full of tongue-in-cheek humor," the press release read. One can only imagine. Oh, the horror. "In the PlayStation, Dreamcast and PC versions, each mission of the 3D action/adventure game gives gamers the opportunity to step into Valerie Irons' shoes and to provide protection for a new star. Protection is assured by the use of a range of weapons, each more outlandish than the one before." Oh joy. I shouldn't be so jaded, I know. No word yet on which team within Ubi will do the honors, but with Batman development well underway it will be interesting to see who draws the short straw. We'll update you as more information becomes available.

SEE SCTV ON DCTV

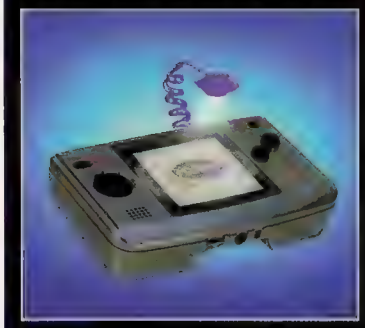


There have been some cool creations crafted from the influence of video games over in Japan, but this hands down has got to be the coolest. It appears that Fuji Television is going to release a limited-edition two-in-one Dreamcast television combo. The system, called Divers 2000 Series CX-1, has a unique and very stylish look. Housed inside the light-blue lacquered shell are a Dreamcast, four controller inputs, modem and all. It won't be available through normal retailers, but if you've got ¥88,888 lying around the house, which is about $850 greenbacks here in the states, you could be the lucky owner of a very cool piece of Sega memorabilia.

To those heavy into import titles, the look of the television may be familiar. It has a striking resemblance to the last boss character in Space Channel 5. How cool is that?

NGP RELIEF!

A version of Nyko's much-celebrated Worm Light, the ultimate illuminator for your Gameboy Color, is on the way for the Neo Pocket Color. That's right. You don't have to play under that lamp anymore, and just in time (well hopefully) for Metal Slug 2, Magician Lord and Last Blade. No news yet on a release date, but how long can it take?



NO ADVANCES FOR ADVANCE

Now that it has been revealed that construction of the Game Boy Advance hardware is complete, the overriding question remains: when can we get our eager little hands on one? Nintendo refuses to give a definitive answer, uncertain that now is the time to release a new handheld system in the wake of the Game Boy Color, which shows no sign of slowing down. With the Dolphin not even a speck on the radar, the prospect of this promising new Nintendo hardware becomes even more valuable. Think about it: how cool is it going to be to receive newly developed SNES-quality games that you can take anywhere you want?

SLAY ME

While we may be afraid of shows like *VIP* heading for our favorite consoles, we're all for a game being made from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*! Just take a look at these shots... chicks, and vampires. Okay. Make us a a game! The Buffy game will be a third-person action/adventure available for Dreamcast, PlayStation, and PC, featuring many of the characters from the first few seasons of the show.

DOMAIN FEVER!

While shopping around eBay, we checked to see just how many PS2s were making their way over to our shores through entrepreneur-like investments. People who were able to get a system overseas for nearly $400 have been able to sell them through the online auction for upwards of $1000—not too bad at all.

What really surprised us was the increasingly high number of URL domain names involving the PS2 that were up for sale, the most inviting ones starting at a cool 10Gs. The addresses SONYPSX2.COM and SONYPS2.NET, both very instinctive names, are selling for $10,000 a piece.

Needless to say, others have taken a crack at purchasing a domain name solely for the purpose of pawning it off to someone who may do something significant with it.

ALWAYS USE PROTECTION

Evoking fond memories of the kind of flesh wounds caused by Konami's Track and Field on NES, several incidents involving injury from playing Nintendo's Mario Party have recently been reported. To safeguard against possible blistering when rapidly rotating the joystick, Nintendo has agreed to supply four protective gloves to any household that requests them.

"The correct way to play the mini-games, as detailed in the manual, is using your thumb. Some kids chose to use the palm of their hand," said Nintendo PR manager Beth Llewelyn. "To put it in perspective, we've sold a little over a million copies of the game and to date we've only received 90 complaints. Really we're talking about blisters.We don't view this as a huge safety issue but we do have our consumers in mind, so we want to help those folks out."

If you've experienced any blisters or puncture wounds from this great party game, we suggests you take a break instead of calling Nintendo to whine.

LIVE LARA SET TO RAID

Just in case all you boys out there were getting bored of graphic renderings and non-speaking models, Hollywood's latest favorite leading lady, Angelina Jolie, has signed on to star as the Female Indiana Jones/Daisy Dukes wearing/backyard bangin' like a benzy/Adventure enthusiast Lara Croft.

With a script that has suffered numerous rewrites from numerous writers (including the team who wrote John Woo's *Face/Off*), Paramount Pictures announced that Jolie was in final negotiations to play the lead in the upcoming live-action Tomb Raider flick. The storyline we've heard is that the publishing rich-girl travels the globe to kick some major ass and preserve invaluable ancient artifacts—sounds just like the game.

The 24-year-old Jolie was recently nominated for an Academy Award and won a Golden Globe for her role in the film *Girl, Interrupted*. Simon West, who previously directed *Con Air* and *The General's Daughter* (both earning over $100 million dollars at the box-office), will direct the film, which is scheduled to start shooting this summer.

Since you let your girlfriend go with her friends to see *Girl, Interrupted*, you can take your chump buddies to check out Angelina and Nick Cage rev it up in this summer's gonna-be-a-blockbuster flick *Gone in 60 Seconds*. Or maybe if you're too lazy you can rent "The Bone Collector" to see her and Denzel Washington mix it up.

Actually and honestly, your best bet is to get your older "over 17-years-old" sibling to rent "Gia," so you can watch her Emmy nominated performance and see what's really under Daisy's Dukes. Tell 'em Cooter sent cha!

ONE HELLUVA LINE-UP

On the eve of the PS2 launch in Japan, long lines were formed in front of retailers who carried the unit, and those who lined up felt what life on the streets is like– Cold and hard. How's that frozen butt? Literally, people slept on the street for one to two nights (the record was three nights) to obtain the PS2. Boy, I bet he's pissed about EX3.

One of the guys who positioned himself as the first man to get the PS2 in front of a retailer in Akihabara was holding GR to spend the time and go to sleep with. You're a wise man...and you've got a PS2! Wanna sell it?

Sony originally estimated that March 4th launch sales of its PlayStation 2 would reach an unprecedented 2 million units, but due to supply shortages, the final figures came in at a still-phenomenal 980,000. Had the system manufacturing not been hampered by memory-card shortages, Sony quite likely would have reached its lofty launch goals. Sales of software exceeded 1.3 million copies, with Ridge Racer V and Kessen leading the charge at 240,000 and 150,000, respectively.

THIS DOLPHIN DON'T SWIM

There had been talk that Nintendo would release its successor to the Nintendo 64 by year's end, but now that date looks to be in jeopardy even in Japan. Nintendo is still uncertain that the Dolphin will launch overseas before Christmas, and it could be as late as mid-summer next year before the system reaches an American audience.

If E3 doesn't shed more light on Nintendo's plan, the most concrete information should come out of the Nintendo Space World show being held on August 25-27, where a final name, price and system details will be revealed.

If there's any good news to come out of this delay, it's that Nintendo is promising an extensive batch of games for launch, and you can pretty much count on Mario leading the charge against Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 (and X Box). Nintendo of America president Minoru Arakawa has said that the Dolphin is being made for the sole purpose of playing games, and that Nintendo's most popular characters will be fully represented; it's both exciting and comforting to know that Nintendo is only concerned with doing what they arguably do better than anyone in the world.

But let's face it: with Nintendo's track record, there's no telling when the system will launch and exactly what it will bring to the table. Until then, the likes of Zelda 2: Majora's Mask, Banjo-Tooie and Mario RPG can soften the wait.

MONTHLY CHARTS PROVIDED BY NPD DATA TRACKING SERVICES
THE NPD GROUP INC

database

YOUR NUMBER ONE SOURCE FOR TOP SELLING CONSOLE AND COMPUTER GAME STATISTICS

top ten selling playstation titles

*RANKED ON UNITS SOLD FEBRUARY 20-FEBRUARY 26, 2000

1. GRAN TURISMO 2	SONY	6. NEED FOR SPEED: High Stakes	EA
2. SLED STORM	ACTIVISION	7. SPYRO THE DRAGON	SONY
3. T. HAWK PRO SKATER	ACTIVISION	8. DUKES OF HAZZARD	SOUTHPEAK
4. FEAR EFFECT	EIDOS	9. GRAN TURISMO	SONY
5. ECW: Hardcore Rev.	ACCLAIM	10. NBA LIVE 2000	EA

top ten selling nintendo64 titles

*RANKED ON UNITS SOLD FEBRUARY 20-FEBRUARY 26, 2000

1. MARIO PARTY 2	NINTENDO	6. ECW: Hardcore Rev.	ACCLAIM
2. WWF Wrestlemania 2000	ACCLAIM	7. NAMCO MUSEUM 64	NAMCO
3. DONKEY KONG 64	NINTENDO	8. ZELDA: O.o.T.	NINTENDO
4. SUPER SMASH BROS.	NINTENDO	9. GOLDENEYE 007	NINTENDO
5. SUPER MARIO 64	NINTENDO	10. MARIO KART 64	NINTENDO

top ten selling dreamcast titles

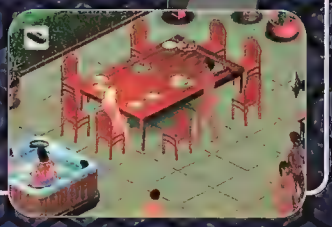
*RANKED ON UNITS SOLD FEBRUARY 20-FEBRUARY 26, 2000

1. CRAZY TAXI	SEGA	6. ZOMBIE REVENGE	SEGA
2. NHL 2K	SEGA	7. SONIC ADVENTURE	SEGA
3. NBA 2K	SEGA	8. SOUL CALIBUR	NAMCO
4. LEGACY OF KAIN: SR	EIDOS	9. WWF ATTITUDE	ACCLAIM
5. NFL 2K	SEGA	10. SEGA BASS FISHING	SEGA

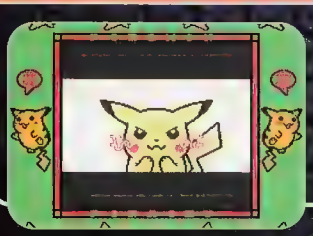
top ten selling pc titles

*RANKED ON UNITS SOLD FEBRUARY 20-FEBRUARY 26, 2000

1. THE SIMS	EA	6. AGE OF EMPIRES 2	MICROSOFT
2. WHO WANTS..MILLIONAIRE	DISNEY	7. QUAKE 3 ARENA	ACTIVSION
3. ROLLER COASTER TYCOON	HASBRO	8. MILLENNIUM GAMEPAK	VALUSOFT
4. NOX	EA	9. RAINBOW SIX GOLD	RED STORM
5. RC TYCOON: CORK	HASBRO	10. BALDUR'S GATE	INTERPLAY



top ten selling overall console titles



*RANKED ON UNITS SOLD FEBRUARY 20-FEBRUARY 26, 2000

1. POKÉMON YELLOW-GBC	NINTENDO	6. POKÉMON BLUE-GBC	NINTENDO
2. MARIO PARTY 2-N64	NINTENDO	7. SLED STORM-PS	EA
3. POKÉMON RED-GBC	NINTENDO	8. WWF WRSTLMNIA 2000-N64	THQ
4. GRAN TURISMO 2-PS	SONY	9. NFL 2K-DC	SEGA
5. CRAZY TAXI-DC	SEGA	10. T. HAWK PRO SKATER-PS	ACTIVISION

world republic top ten games

top ten japanese titles

1. TRADE & BATTLE Card Hero GB
2. MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: Giren's Ambition PS
3. POCKET MONSTER SILVER GB
4. POCKET MONSTER GOLD GB
5. GUITAR FREAKS: 2nd mix PS
6. SENKAIDEN: TV Animation WS
7. SEGA GT Homologation Sp DC
8. AERO DANCING F DC
9. KENKI: Construction Machine Simulator PS
10. VAGRANT STORY PS

* FROM FEB 21 ~ FEB 27, 2000

top ten u.k. titles

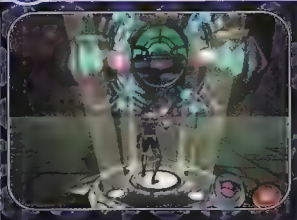
1. RESIDENT EVIL 3: Nemesis PS
2. GRAN TURISMO 2 PS
3. TOY STORY 2 N64/PS/PC
4. POKÉMON RED GB
5. POKÉMON BLUE GB
6. ISS PRO EVOLUTION PS
7. THE SIMS PC
8. CRAZY TAXI DC
9. MEDAL OF HONOUR PS
10. SUPERBIKES 2000 PC/PS

* WEEK ENDING 3/4/00

gamers' republic top ten games

* BASED ON GAMES PLAYED THROUGH FEBRUARY 15, 2000

d. halverson



1. MDK 2 DC
2. RIDGE RACER V PS2
3. BERSERK: GUTS RAGE DC
4. NIGHTMARE CREATURES 2 DC
5. SUPER MAGNETIC NEO DC
6. STRIDER 2 PS2
7. SPIDERMAN PS
8. DEAD OR ALIVE 2 DC
9. FEAR EFFECT PS
10. STREET FIGHTER EX3 PS2

b. siechter

1. MEDIEVIL 2 PS
2. STRIDER 2 PS
3. BERSERK DC
4. RIDGE RACER V PS2
5. SPEEK PUNKS PS
6. MAKEN X DC
7. STRIDER PS
8. ETERNAL RING PS2
9. STREET FIGHTER EX3 PS2
10. TOMB RAIDER 4 DC

mike hobbs

1. RIDGE RACER V PS2
2. FANTAVISION PS2
3. KESSEN PS2
4. SEGA GT DC
5. BERSERK DC
6. ETERNAL RING PS2
7. STREET FIGHTER EX3 PS2
8. RADIANT SILVERGUN SS
9. GUNBIRD 2 DC
10. MR. DRILLER PS

t. stratton

1. T. HAWK PRO SKATER PS
2. GRAN TURISMO PS
3. NBA 2K DC
4. FIFA 2000 PS
5. 1080 N64
6. ROAD RASH 2 GEN
7. SNATCHER SEGA CD
8. W. SERIES BASEBALL SS
9. MARIO PAINT SNES
10. NFL 2K PS

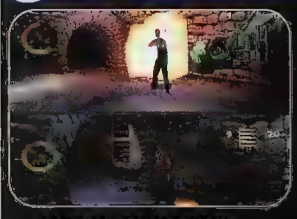
pooch

1. RIDGE RACER V PS2
2. SYPHON FILTER 2 PS
3. ROCKET: R.O.W. N64
4. NBA 2K DC
5. HOT SHOTS GOLF 2 PS
6. CRAZY TAXI DC
7. FEAR EFFECT PS
8. ZELDA: Link's Awake. GBC
9. B.B. CRAZY CASTLE 3 GBC
10. S. SOSA SOFTBALL PS

j. r. haugen

1. RIDGE RACER V PS2
2. ETERNAL RING PS2
3. MR. DRILLER PS
4. FANTAVISION PS2
5. SPYRO 2: Ripto's Rage PS
6. LUNAR: SSS Complete PS
7. SM NIU NIU DC
8. BERSERK DC
9. AGE OF EMPIRES II PC
10. MINESWEEPER PC

edd sear



1. MEDAL OF HONOR PS
2. METAL SLUG 2 NGPC
3. SPYRO 2 PS
4. GRAN TURISMO 2 PS
5. RIDGE RACER V PS2
6. LOONEY TUNES COLL. GBC
7. DIVE ALERT: Rebecca NGPC
8. T. HAWK PRO SKATER PS
9. DRIVER PS
10. MOBIL ONE RALLY PS

bob elmquist

1. BERSERK DC
2. NFL 2K DC
3. MAKEN X DC
4. FEAR EFFECT PS
5. RAINBOW 6 N64
6. BLITZ 2000 DC
7. LEGACY OF KAIN: SR DC
8. RED ALARM VIRTUAL BOY
9. MEDAL OF HONOR PS
10. T. HAWK PRO SKATER PS

NIGHTMARE CREATURES 2

BY BRADY FIECHTER

One of the darkest, bloodiest, most unabashedly graphic games in recent memory casts its creepy shadow over the Dreamcast and PlayStation

It must be rough spending most of your life strapped to an operating table, having your body mutilated, probed and supernaturally altered by a psychotic doctor who has descended into a pit of black magic. Such is the plight of Herbert Wallace, the deliriously pissed off hero in Nightmare Creatures II.

Perhaps calling Herbert a hero may be somewhat of a stretch. Most heroes don't use a bloody axe to rip open the chest cavities of fallen foes. Most heroes don't kill their victim and then continue to shred the body in an uncontrollable rage, sending additional chunks of flesh and spurts of blood onto the walls.

Then again, most games aren't Nightmare Creatures II, one of the darkest, grizzliest, most violently unhinged games you'll ever play. The game suffocates light and happy thoughts, making no excuses for its explicit extremes, crawling to the very edge of graphic horror. It aims to frighten you, consume you in its dense cloud of gloom and doom.

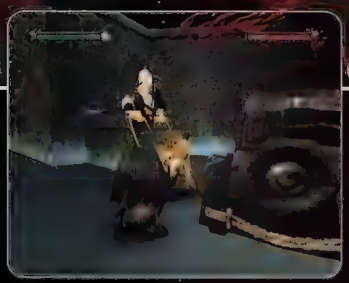
The game begins in the atmospheric confines of a crumbling hospital, where Wallace is seen escaping his padded cell. As he works his way through the horribly rusted, maggot-infested corridors, an ambulance is eventually found, transporting him into the snowy London night. Refusing to seize his newfound freedom, driven be a murderous hunger for vengeance, Wallace continues on a quest to locate his former torturer, Dr. Crowley.

Once outside the haunting city streets of the early-20th-century London, you'll enter into equally atmospheric settings like a gothic castle, an abandoned museum, and the alleys and rooftops of Paris. Waiting in the darkness are Dr. Crowley's freakish lab rats, a truly creepy bunch of mutated monsters that wage relentless attacks with anything from chainsaws and meat hooks to butcher knives and giant claws.

Often introduced through cinematic cut scenes, the monsters stumble out of closets, rise from bloody gurneys, turn their attention from a meal of fleshy rib cages. The mood of the moment is used to great effect, and the monster design can be genuinely unsettling: an emaciated six-legged creature skirts across the ceiling, its spinal column exposed; a human mutation with spindly arms as long as its legs licks a bloody knife before coming in for an attack.

Confrontation with the monsters is unique in that you are automatically locked onto them when in their immediate vicinity. Kalisto has emphasized their

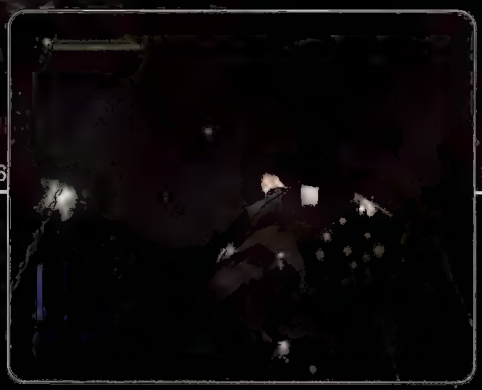
The monsters in Nightmare Creatures II refuse to go down easy, especially when they're carrying around giant chainsaws (right). There's really only one way to fight back – with an axe. Amazing just how much blood these skinny freaks spout (far right).



Revenge comes easy when you've been tortured by a freak in a hospital most of your life

desire for ease of play, recognizing how difficult and awkward combat can be in a 3D environment. With this focused attack system, you don't have to worry about losing positioning on your target, and you are always squared up, able to circle around for dodging and blocking, using weapons and magic, and lunging with basic combos with your axe. The enemy is resilient, sometimes taking a dozen or so blows before falling, often minus a head or limb—every monster can be mutilated with a gruesome fatality. Get too close, and the monster will lash back with its own powerful special.

The eight, visually superb areas in Nightmare Creatures II are enormous, but fortunately there is very little backtracking needed to locate the keys and other items required to move into new territory. Kalisto wants you to lose your grasp of reality, not your sanity, while battling with frustration from an endless search for items or the answer to an obscure puzzle. Pass through dark and grizzly settings, confront hordes of freakish enemies, commit multiple acts of intense violence—this is the mode of transport into the grim world of Nightmare Creatures 2. GR



The frustrating drowning from the first game is gone. Now Wallace can swim through the murky waters (left).

Kalisto's Dan Kaufman fleshes out the gory details on 2000's spookiest (and most twisted) game

GR: Have you recreated actual environments for NM2?
DK: Yes, just like we did in NC1. We went to each location, took tons of photos, bought resource books, etc. We find that this research makes it easier to create environments that truly immerse the player in the world. For example, if you go to Paris, you can get a tour of the catacombs displayed in the game — although if you see blood spots in the Paris version, you might want to leave. [Laughs]

GR: In creating a horror title, an emphasis must obviously be placed on scaring or surprising the player. If the screen goes letterbox before confrontations (which is very cool by the way), how will you achieve this?
DK: Thanks for the comment about the letterbox — we think it is cool too. [Laughs] The idea behind the letterbox is to create a true cinematic feel to the game. The scariness of the game is actually achieved through various means. We have many monsters popping out which is always a classic scare tactic, but we also manipulate the sound to create a sense of dread and tension. The letterbox actually serves the scare factor pretty well in that it can foreshadow some events, without letting the player know exactly when the event will occur: i.e., there is a scene where you see a monster running away, you know you have never fought the monster and are sure at some point you will have to face it — but when is an unknown.

GR: These character designs are some of the best ever, in fact, they're probably the coolest the genre's ever seen. Some of them seem to have some Marilyn Manson influences. Is Anti-Christ Superstar or Mechanical Animals popular around the office?
DK: Yes. You should come to Bordeaux—there are lots of posters from bands (Marilyn Manson, Rob Zombie, etc.) as well as movies (Evil Dead, etc.).

GR: What are the NM2 team's surroundings like?
DK: Paradise. We just sit on a beach all day while supermodels periodically rub us with suntan lotion. Well, maybe not. Actually, I think our place is a lot like other development studios — lots of people working furiously, long into the night, surrounded by lots of cool toys, strange posters and loud music.

GR: Was NM2 originally conceived as a PS game, a Dreamcast game or both?
DK: In an odd sense neither. We first come up with the game that we want to build, and one that we hope people will really enjoy playing. Then we look at the hardware available and see what is possible. PlayStation was always planned, because we knew that there was a lot more that could be done with it than people had done in the past. We worked on the original PowerVR cards, so we knew that when Dreamcast became viable we would love to move the game onto that platform as well — luckily for us Konami and Universal agreed.

GR: Besides the obvious graphical differences, what sets them apart?
DK: Well we radically upped the polygon count, so our hero has 700 polygons to himself. We ramped the frame-rate up pretty dramatically to ensure that the fighting is smooth and intuitive. The RTCs (real-time cinematics) we added to enhance the feeling that you really are in a gothic 1930s horror film. We added a lot of abilities to the hero as well (climbing, swimming, etc.). We added fatalities — so now the hero can execute special moves for each monster and each monster has its own fatality for the hero. Also, we figured out how to asynchronously load the levels, so they are now huge worlds and still there are no load times.

GR: What do you feel is the single most important aspect of this game? In other words, what are you hoping people will really go crazy for? Is it exploration, the ambience, the fighting...?
DK: The goal of the team was to put you into a gothic horror movie and to make the game so involving that you lose track of time. To do this, we really need all the elements to come together—music, art, fighting, exploration, etc.

GR: The rain and fire fx in the real-time cinemas—how'd you do that on PS?
DK: Alas, a trade secret. However, if you come to Bordeaux we can show you some more tricks we have discovered — as well as a thing or two on PS2 that is pretty amazing. [Laughs]

GR: Rob Zombie's influence not only fits like an old decaying glove, but it also makes the intro and cinemas as hard core as ever. How did you get him? Is he into games at all?
DK: In a word — Universal. One of the great advantages of teaming with a large media company like Universal is that you get access to talent that would normally be beyond our grasp. We have heard that Rob really likes the game, but I look forward to talking with him at some length about games. And if I do, I will be happy to tell you what he said.

GR: In our preview version only certain surfaces had collision. Will everything have collision in the final or is there a purpose for this?
DK: Originally we had collision on everything, but through play testing we found people were spending too much time endlessly breaking objects in the hope that there were hidden power-ups. The problem with this is that it reminds the player that it is merely a game, rather than an adventure. So to avoid this, we limited the number if things you could break to things that are likely to yield a power-up or are obviously in need of being smashed.

GR: Are you planning any alternate endings or other reasons to play through more than once?
DK: This is a hotly debated issue at Kalisto. One camp believes that it's a single experience, and multiple endings destroy this feeling. They argue that multiple endings again remind the player that it is a game, so he/she will not get as involved in the universe as desired. [Ed. Agreed] The other side agrees in principle, but thinks the cinematics are so cool, why not let the player see more of them as a reward? Currently, the former camp's winning, but we can make that decision right at the end

GR: You guys obviously take your time developing a game. Many of today's larger companies inflict stringent timelines on developers, and the results are, well, crappy games. How have you managed to stay true to your audience? Do you make it clear going into a project that you won't be rushed or cut corners? Or, is that why you're with Konami/Universal? They seem very developer friendly.

DK: We are in a bit of a unique position — and one we fought very hard to get to. We have the ability to fund our own development, which allows us a greater degree of freedom in seeking out our publishing/distribution relationships. Everyone in the company remembers saving up our money to buy a game, only to get home and realize it was terrible. This was the worst feeling ever. You just blew all your money and had nothing to show for it. A key driving force in our company is to never make someone else feel like that. So when we wanted to develop NC2, we made several decisions: we would not build an "add-on" pack, we would generate a new engine from the ground up, and we would push the PS to its absolute limits. Then we talked with a lot of publishers and distributors until we found someone who agreed with our vision and were just as enthusiastic about the game as we were. The Universal/Konami partnership is a dream. We get the full resources of Universal, access to their talent (Rob Zombie, etc.), etc. On top of that, we get Konami's distribution, which is truly impressive. Also, it is nice to be associated with the companies responsible for Crash Bandicoot, Spyro, Metal Gear Solid, etc.

GR: How quickly did you jump onto this project after finishing the first game?

DK: It seems like the game has been in development for quite some time. It has been in development for quite a while. We take a lot of time trying to nail down the play mechanics and then to integrate them into the world of NC. After we get this down, we build a lot of prototypes and test them out on various groups of people. We see what works and what fails, then we refine the design and world accordingly. This iterative process is time consuming, but we hope the end result shows the effort.

GR: Bottom line: are we going to be scared and partake in a chillingly satisfying adventure? Have you achieved what you set out to achieve?

DK: We sure hope so. Ultimately, it will be for the audience to tell us — but if test groups are any indication, we think we may cause a lot of sleepless nights.

GR: What would you say is the biggest improvement in Nightmare Creatures 2 over the original?

DK: Immersion. I think NC2 is really a solid first step in making a truly immersive experience — one where the art, music, story and gameplay all come together.

GR: The game is oppressively gloomy. Was your intention from the start to go as far as you possibly could with the dark theme?

DK: Yes. At Kalisto, we really frown upon half-efforts or compromised visions. If you are going to go dark, then be bold and do it. We have other games and we try to bring the same sensibility to them as well. For example, with 4 Wheel Thunder, we wanted to make a dizzingly fast, out-of-control racing game — again the audience will judge, but we did everything we could do to make it that way.

GR: Has this game been inspired by graphic novels? What are some of your favorites?

DK: We love graphic novels. There are way too many to list, but Batman is always loved, as is Spawn, Sandman, Preacher, etc. As well as a lot of lesser known books that we cherish and believe will be big hits one day.

GR: Where did the idea from the main character come from? What a twisted freak!

DK: Game mag editors. [Laughs] Well, okay, not really. The hero really started from our core belief that heroes and bad guys need motivations that ring true. We are so tired of the hero who is a hero because he is a hero, and he is good, as evil because he is good, and good must triumph over evil. We always wonder why those heroes don't just sit on the couch, have a beer, watch football and hang out with their babes — why rescue the world, when everything is at your fingertips? Instead, we wanted to make our hero a real person, someone who acts because it's the only thing that makes sense. So we made our hero be a victim of Crowley — this not only helps explain why he's trying to stop Crowley's evil plans, but also allowed us to play with his personality. We believe that Herbert is not altogether sure whether the monsters are real or imagined — it doesn't matter, he just needs the pain to stop.

GR: Your enemy designs are truly creepy.

DK: Well, when Herbert is the good guy, it dictates a direction for the bad guys.

GR: Tell us about the gruesome fatalities in the game.

DK: We introduced fatalities for two basic reasons — gameplay and character development. On the gameplay front, fatalities allowed the monsters to avoid getting backed into a corner repeatedly and also allowed the player to have a fun way of dispatching the monsters. On the charac-

ter side, it gave us a chase to let Herbert express the incredible rage that burns within his soul.

GR: Okay, an obvious question: Are you guys fans of horror films? Any favorites that maybe influenced your designs?
DK: We're big fans of all horror films really. We like the classic Universal monsters a lot (Dracula, Frankenstein, etc.), Evil Dead, Sam Raimey films in general, Halloween and Friday the 13th, Scream. We actually took over 60 films we loved and broke them down by scene — trying to figure out the tricks these directors used to create fear on the screen. Some of these techniques are pretty applicable to games, so we borrowed from them and hopefully improved them with a few twists of our own.

GR: How are you using sound to enhance mood in the game?
DK: Sound is incredibly underutilized by most games. Go watch Jaws without sound — you will be stunned by how less powerful the movie becomes. We got a lot of comments on NC1 about the sound—in fact Sporty Thieves sampled it for a song on their album—and we wanted to top it in NC2. Now with Rob Zombie added into the mix, we are pretty excited.

GR: Not to undermine what you've accomplished so far, but, honestly, how excited are you guys about taking this theme to PS2? Word is that you have some code up and running that is pretty amazing.
DK: Someone has a big mouth. [Laughs] We did everything in our power to max out the PS1, and it's safe to say that we are trying the same approach on PS2. Already, we have done some things on PS2 that we were told would not be possible — so we are excited but there is still a LOT more to be done.

GR: Aren't you working on some hardware tricks to maintain the gritty texture integrity on the Dreamcast?
DK: Yes. There was a long talk on this matter within the team. Obviously with the DC we can add bi-linear filtering and MIP-mapping, as well as some other compression techniques we have developed. The question was if we added all those features to the game, would it look too smooth and clean and detract from the artistic vision of the product, which is a grainy 1930s film noir gothic feel. We are probably going to make these features optional, so that the player can select which look he/she prefers.

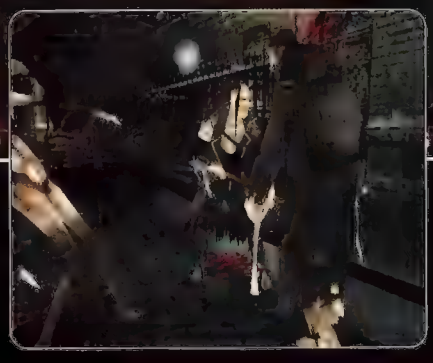
GR: Why did you decide to drop the second playable character?
DK: Play testing showed that people were very confused playing Rachel after starting to master Herbert. She played very differently — two swords used in tandem. After a lot of attempts to homogenize the fighting styles, we realized that it made the game less exciting. So we decided to keep her in the storyline as planned, but not unlock her fighting ability. Our latest play tests seem to be confirming that this was the right decision.

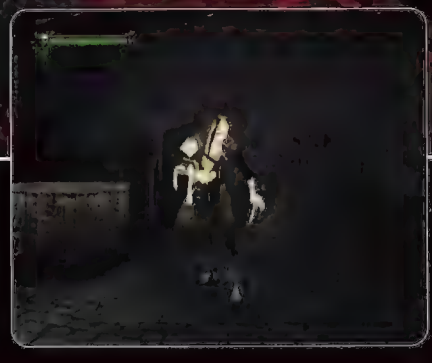
GR: What made you decide to use an automatic lock-on combat system? It seems like a natural thing for a 3D game, like in Zelda and Soul Reaver. It works so well.
DK: Again, play testing. We found that when we gave the player full 3D control, they got frustrated quite quickly as monsters would attack them from behind and they could not easily respond. Once we implemented the auto lock-on, people started playing better and enjoying the game much more.

GR: Any games out there now that really impress you?
DK: Lots. We are all gamers, and play a lot of games. Crazy Taxi is a favorite, CTR is a blast, Metal Gear Solid gets replayed constantly as does Half-Life. We are also having fun with Homeworld. It goes without saying that Code: Veronica rules, as does everything Square does.

GR: It must be fun taking the theme as far as possible. You certainly aren't holding back with the carnage factor.
DK: [Laughs] Again it really goes to our core belief that if you are going to do something — then do it. No compromises!

GR: So now that the game is almost finished and you can rest easy, what's next for the Nightmare Creatures team?
DK: Nightmare 3! We cannot wait to tell you about it, so come on out to Bordeaux!





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SONY'S NEXT PLAY

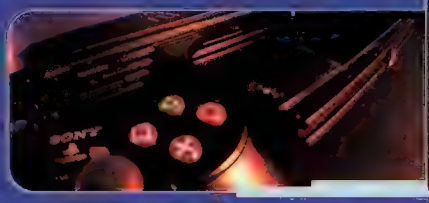
It looks like a giant heat sink, exuding an intoxicating promise of power, resembling nothing less than the intelligence-granting monolith of 2001. It throws around polygons like they were going out of style. It plays movies. The all conquering PlayStation 2 has finally launched in Japan. Was it worth the wait? We take a close look at the hardware and the initial batch of games in search of the answer.

Story by Mike Hobbs
Photography by Jake Rosenberg

DESIGN

Train your eyes on the PlayStation 2. What do you see? Confidence. Selling 80 million PS1s has allowed Sony the audacity to imagine a game console as a vertical slab of black plastic, styled to blend seamlessly with AV gear. The design is full of self-importance, eons away from the carpet-dwelling life of most consoles. One would never put a PS2 on the floor. It demands a coveted spot, to be displayed like a high-end amp, preferably in its striking vertical posture.

Even in the way that the system wants to be touched there is an air of occasion. A main power switch at the back of the unit primes the system and puts into a standby mode, its normal resting state. To actually turn on the PlayStation 2, a red-lighted button, not a switch, must be pressed on the system's face. This button doubles as a reset, with a tap rebooting the machine, and a prolonged press powering it down. Elegant. And once powered up, green and blue LEDs shine from the top of the machine like beacons from the world of tomorrow. Indeed, this machine takes itself seriously. And why not? What's inside will change the face of console graphics.



INTERFACE

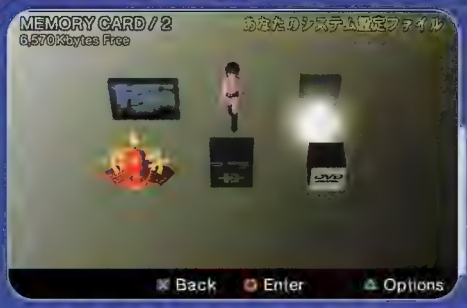
Boot the PlayStation 2 without a game and you're greeted by an interface as futuristic as its stark exterior, Sony leaving little doubt that one of the world's calendars marks the year 2000. Light-trailing spheres flow about, and shiny, refractive cubes dip in and out of focus before a rotating flower of crystals. If you listen closely, you'll hear a faint rising and falling whooshing sound throughout the interface, as if there's a perpetual wind blowing around in this future world Sony is trying to create. In another nice touch, the boot sequence image changes the more you play, with a greater and greater number of transparent cubes appearing over time. If only the CD player interface reflected this same sense of style, being nothing more than an opaque rotating cube with some generic virtual buttons.

DVD PLAYBACK

More than just a game machine, the PS2 is also a movie player, offering up features worthy of a mid-level DVD machine, like DTS decoding and component video output. Image quality was on par with our control unit, a Sony DVP-S530D, which actually costs about the same as the PS2, and it can't even play Ridge Racer V. Reports of skipping and difficulty handling dual layer discs circulated wildly at launch, but we experienced no difficulties. And contrary to its regional design, we were able to play some American DVDs on our first generation system using a simple cheat (insert old-fashioned PS1 digital pad and hold up while the movie boots). However, we don't recommend buying an import PS2 with the intention of playing U.S. DVDs as this trick is sporadic in its effectiveness.

MEMORY CARD

The PS2's Memory Card doesn't look much different from the old ones, apart from being a little more squared-off, but it holds about 30 times the amount of data, weighing in at a hefty 8Mb. It functions like a regular Memory Card, but in addition to storing game saves, it also holds the PS2's DVD and system drivers and your personal system file. A utility disc is included in case the drivers need to be reloaded. An unexpected little treat of the PS2 save system is that game data can be marked with real-time graphics. In the case of Ridge Racer V, a save game shows up as a cute little polygonal model of the game's race queen Ai Fukami. Not very significant, but a neat touch.



I/O PORTS

The most extensive I/O set ever to grace a console can be found on the PS2, with most connection options never before seen on a game system. Two USB ports, presumably for keyboards, mice, and maybe even other controllers, are joined on the front panel by a FireWire plug (labeled S400, or i-Link in Sony parlance), allowing for high speed data transfer, downloading music to a Memory Stick Walkman, for instance. Around the back, a standard PlayStation Multi-AV output allows for stock S-Video leads to be used, but is also capable of outputting component video, which separates the image data into three carrier signals. On a compatible television, you'll get an even more defined picture than with S-Video, and it's the closest thing to RGB you're going to get with consumer electronics. For sound, there is a Toslink optical digital out, a first for a console, allowing for a direct digital connection to a receiver or separate decoder for the playback of DTS and 5.1 Dolby Digital soundtracks. Finally, a PC card slot sits at the rear of the machine, allowing for myriad future enhancements, most likely some kind of Ethernet card at first.

DUAL SHOCK 2

Considering the lengths that Sony went through when designing its new system, it's disappointing that the controller was deprived of a similarly radical upgrading. Analog buttons are an original touch, and they work surprisingly well as varying degrees of pressure actually produce different levels of control, but I've always found the Dual Shock design to be particularly unsuited to 3D gaming. With the N64 and Dreamcast analog sticks, your thumb rests in a vertical position, and natural left/right movements at the joint results in fairly accurate left/right correlation on-screen. With the Dual Shock layout, your thumb sits at an angle, and true left/right is a little nebulous, requiring slightly unnatural thumb articulation. At the very least, Sony has increased the tension in the sticks, providing more resistance and more feedback. And like the original Dual Shock, it simply feels good in the hand, with a reassuring heft and solidity.

BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY

With a sea of PlayStations currently blanketing the world, Sony wisely made the PS2 backward compatible with both hardware and software, adding two worthwhile enhancements: faster loading speeds and texture map smoothing. Though these features do not affect all games, it can make a huge difference in others. Two recent examples, Vagrant Story and Strider 2, look markedly better when running on PlayStation 2. Textures appear as if they're being filtered through a very fine dithering routine, and it blends contrasting pixelation beautifully. Sony did not have to do this, but it makes what are fast becoming trips down memory lane that much better.

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developer **namco**

publisher **namco**

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One of Ridge Racer V's most effective graphical touches is a depth-of-field trick used in replays. Notice how the car in the foreground and the far background are both out of focus.

Details like the palm trees and roadside decorations whipping by above are very delicately rendered, lending a sense of realism that has never been seen before on a home console.

RIDGE RACER V

BY MIKE HOBBS

Ridge Racer V has nothing to do with realistic physics, focusing almost the whole of its gameplay around exciting powerslides and daredevil hole shots.

Utterly amazing: That's what Namco's Ridge Racer V is. A new era is definitely upon us here, so profound is the impact of this game's PS2-powered visuals. When one compares RRV to anything on Dreamcast, it's like being given a new pair of eyes, the graphical leap offered by the Emotion Engine shoving game imagery into the 21st century with an 800 horsepower engine, and this is just the beginning.

It's difficult to convey just what kind of an effect the graphics of this game have on the experience of the play, still firmly and lovingly rooted in years-old Ridge Racer convention and track design. Put simply, the human brain has never been so well fooled by a console game, and that is the key to understanding the importance of what Ridge Racer V represents. The delicately detailed images produced by this game are so clear, so smooth, and the effect of light and scenery flowing over the stunning car models is so seemingly true to life that your brain simply buys what it sees as a reality. And the more convinced your brain is that what it is sensing is real, the more pronounced and deeper one's emotional connection to the game can be. This is a rather unexpected side effect of the PS2's power, and it is why better graphics are actually a true means to an end. Anyone caught complaining about the PS2 offering nothing more than a new level of polygon pushing is completely, foolishly, and sadly missing the point. Yes, the insanely addictive experience of throwing a car into a slide and holding your breath through a crowded hairpin can be had in any Ridge Racer game, but here, that experience is so much richer visually as to feel almost completely new. You'll

see brake discs glowing red hot, instrument clusters lit up in the dark, perfectly dissipating tire smoke, polygonal reflections in buildings, pockets of detail tucked into every corner, all at 60 frames per second.

In contrast to the highly developed imagery, the actual design of Ridge Racer V is strikingly streamlined, with a simplicity that is refreshing, and I think necessary, in this, the age of the micro-manageable Gran Turismo. Namco steered RRV away from sky-rocketing car counts, vehicle upgrading, and real-world physics, staying true to the spirit of the original Ridge Racer and Revolution. And indeed, compared to Gran Turismo, this thing feels like an action game, supercharged by very aggressive opponent AI and masterful scenery design, making no apologies for being artificial in its quest to entertain. This arcade-like approach proves to be a perfect match for the larger-than-life visuals, and the resultant emotional stimulation is very, very high, bolstered in no small part by a thrilling, licensed soundtrack. Kohta's "Euphoria" track has to be one of the great Ridge Racer tunes of all time.

The experience of Ridge Racer V is a new visual high, and it is arguably one of the most exciting console racing games in history. For what it attempts to be, the gameplay is jaw-droppingly good and hugely replayable, and I defy anyone but the most hardcore Gran Turismo advocate not to be completely bowled over by Ridge Racer V. And if it's true that Namco only used a portion of the PS2's available power (evidenced by slight traces of pop-up), the future is even more astounding than we can imagine. A new era indeed. **GR**

AI cars exhibit ruthless behavior, making each race intense. And thanks to the processing power of PS2, opponents are bathed in reflective effects and specular highlights.

Night-time races are visual treats, and in this replay, notice the apparent luminosity of the headlights and the awesome level of background detail and depth.

Multiple layers and varying opacities lend the smoke effects in RRV an uncanny realism, seen here as the computer car's tires light up during a drift.

The beautiful Angel car is one of four "hidden" vehicles in RRV, earned through racing in the Time Attack mode. Notice the brake discs glowing red hot.

The ambient lighting effects are amazing, as is the draw distance and level of detail. Also look at how the car's glass is both transparent and reflective at the same time.

A two-player split screen mode is included in Ridge Racer V, but it is heavily fogged, a sign that the PS2 is not yet firing on all cylinders.

developer **from software**

publisher **from software**

available **now japan**

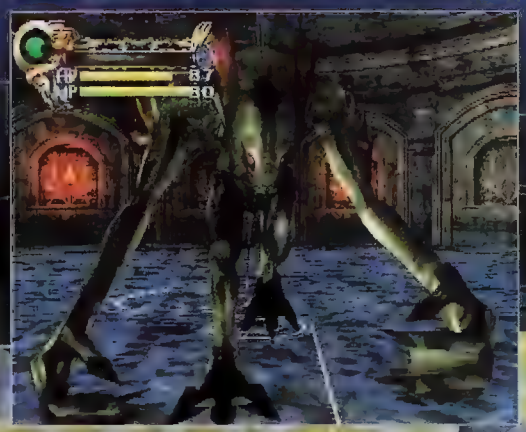
ETERNAL RING

BY J. R. HAUGEN

Eternal Ring is the kind of game whose sales will be motivated primarily because it represented its genre in the early stages of the PlayStation 2, and not because of the quality of the game itself. This is, of course, not to say that the game lacks quality; far from it. But looking down the long road that is the lifespan of the PS2, there are many, many great games in its future, be they adventure games, sports games, racing games, or role-playing games. Eternal Ring, for now, is going to have to carry the category, like its great-grandfather on PlayStation, King's Field did. Interesting how it does so, considering how many RPGs have a plot just like that, of the descendant reprising the work of the ancestor.

The graphical prowess of the PS2 is put on display immediately, showing the main character, Cain, sailing to a mysterious isle, with beautiful water effects completing the scenery. He disembarks from the boat and heads into a gaping grotto, leaving his companion behind. As the second man is roping the boat, a dragon flies into view in the corner of the camera's eye, and suffice it to say that the next thing you know, the guy and the boat end up on the ocean floor. Stranded, Cain must forge on into unfamiliar territory.

It's striking just how similar the gameplay in Eternal Ring is to the games in the King's Field line, and unfortunate in light of the fact that the play is controlled entirely with the digital pad, and not the analog stick (sore thumbs are almost guaranteed). King's Field was fun because it was a gigantic 3D world to explore, albeit quite slowly. Eternal Ring does that, and does it one, or maybe one thousand, better, because it makes everything look so much more realistic. The textures in the caves, the detail on the sahagin creatures, the fire engulfing



the village—it all helps to make you feel like you are in a genuine 3D world.

But there are flaws. At first, movement is slow and tedious, though this is remedied early in the game. Combat is just as unimaginative as it was in the previous games, with you bobbing and weaving around enemies in predictable patterns. Later in the game, there are enemies who cruelly take your life with one inadvertent thrust, after you have gone up a few experience levels patiently killing them off without trudging back to a save point (by which time the creatures would have respawned anyway). At one point, there is even a generous amount of non-atmospheric fog, almost insulting the mighty PlayStation 2. Generally, though, all this doesn't harm the game beyond repair, because there is a lot of good in it.

What I find most interesting is the ring system. Throughout your travels, you come across numerous stones of varying colors and power levels, which you collect and stockpile. You eventually find a levitating guru who gives you the ability to assemble the stones in different combinations to create or upgrade all sorts of rings. Some are for offense, some are for defense and healing, and others are for simple enhancement magic. You can wear five rings on each hand, being able to scroll through the five equipped offensive ones simply by pushing X. The magical effects of the rings themselves are a joy to behold, and there are 100 rings to choose from.

As far as RPGs go, Eternal Ring isn't the best out there, and there is no way it is going to stand up in the long run, the same fate that befell its PlayStation predecessors. For the time being, however, it is worth playing just to take in the wonderful visuals of an expansive new environment teeming with fanciful magic and fascinating monsters. This game is just a hint of what's to come on PS2, and having had just a taste, I can't wait for the main course. GR

developer **koei**

publisher **koei**

available **now japan**

KESSEN

BY MIKE HOBBS

Next to Ridge Racer V, Koei's battle epic Kessen (literally, decisive battle) is the PS2's other visual wonder. Comparisons to Akira Kurosawa's Ran are a bit over the top, but there's no denying that we're seeing something new in Kessen, a level of polygonal activity bringing a vibrancy and life to this typically dry genre.

Kessen is a real-time strategy game set in 17th-century Japan, and true to Koei form, it takes its cues from history as it attempts to re-create the country-shaking struggle between the Tokugawa and Ishida clans for control of the shogun. With a cast made up entirely of real figures from Japan's past, Kessen is at once an interactive history lesson and a vessel with which to rewrite that history. It's a sci-fi concept disguised as a medieval strategy game.

As expected from such a scenario, the Kanji is dense in Kessen, and finer aspects of the game remain opaque to me quite honestly, but spending some time with it has its rewards, mostly visual. The real-time battle scenes, though beyond your control, are amazing to watch nonetheless. Impossibly long rows of soldiers prop up their spears before charging horses; powerful cannons blast rushing troops in an explosion of blood-less carnage; hordes of horse-mounted warriors clash in close combat. The characters may not move with all that much grace or be that complex in form, but the sight of dozens of warring figures is truly something to behold.

Kessen, like Eternal Ring, also comes on a DVD format PS2 disc, and seeing MPEG-2 video is a real kick coming from a console. The game's crystal-clear cut scenes showing hundreds upon hundreds of warriors is a suitably dramatic showcase for this technology. But when Square-quality CG makes an appearance on PS2, then we will see the true potential of DVD-based games.

If only this game were in English, we could give a better sense of the actual quality of the gameplay; on the surface it seems good, and presumably it's very deep. But taken as pure spectacle, Kessen proves, like Ridge Racer, that the PS2's high level of graphics can bring a freshness to any genre, even one as potentially staid as a historical war simulator. **GR**

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www.gamersrepublic.com

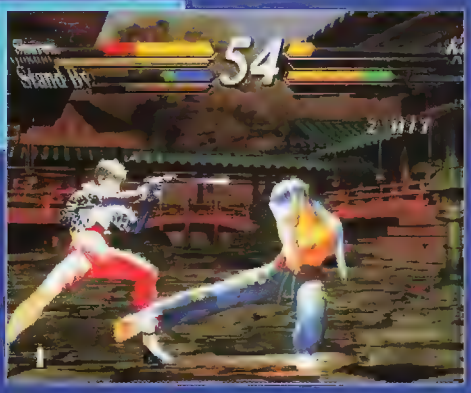
developer **arika**

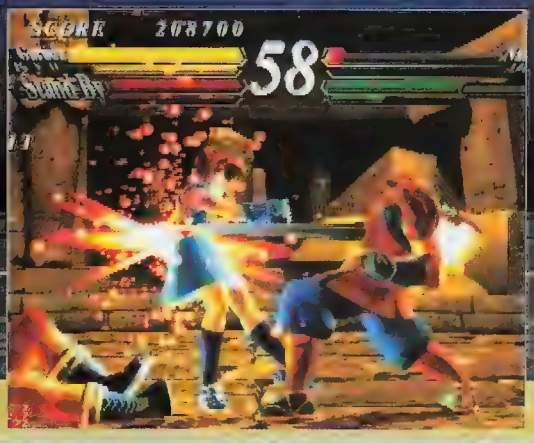
publisher **capcom**

available **september**

STREET FIGHTER EX 3

BY BRADY FIECHTER





Have you ever seen such striking colors?" That question lingered the first time I played Street Fighter EX3, a throwaway Street Fighter game that is better received as a tech demo than a dominating entry into Capcom's indelible series. You play this game to drink in the newness of the PlayStation 2 visuals—a newness that's fed from a vein of colors so rich and natural that you're content just to watch the game for a peek into the next realm of 3D game design.

Part of the visual impact comes from the support of invaluably high resolution and a newfound availability of lighting: when particles form, they exhibit an incendiary realism as they radiate in bursts of sparks; the huge, brawny fighters are given an illusion of a greater model sophistication, which is apparent in close-ups, their faces gorgeously fleshed out.

Trapped in the deafening hype generated months before the PlayStation 2's release, it is understandable why some have received Street Fighter EX3 with guarded enthusiasm. I've seen some blasé responses to the game, and as much as I'm impressed by what Capcom has accomplished with the PlayStation 2, there are indeed many signs of a rushed game and a tenuous grasp of new hardware. Surprisingly, the game slows down when four characters are onscreen, and they animate like their 32-bit predecessors. The backgrounds, while certainly impressive and packed with detail, exhibit an odd effect, moving independently and artificially in layers that resemble 2D parallax. Also, the ground is visibly hinged to the background planes, a graphical flaw unavoidable on PlayStation but a sloppy, harsh presence on PlayStation 2.

A scrutinizing (and cynical) eye could point out other areas that leave room for improvement, but don't forget that this is a launch title: it's groundbreaking in many ways, a hint at the unbounded possibilities of the PlayStation 2.

It's easy to get ensnared in the visual trappings of PlayStation 2, forgiving a game for any gameplay inadequacies. I'll admit it: I played Street Fighter EX3 solely for its images. It plays just like the limp Street Fighter EX2, with the same sluggish control and stale, unpure EX mechanics. You've got the addition of tag battles and group battles, but take away the visual underpinning, and this game collapses. GR

developer **from software**

publisher **from software**

available **fall**

ARMORED CORE 2

BY MIKE HOBBS

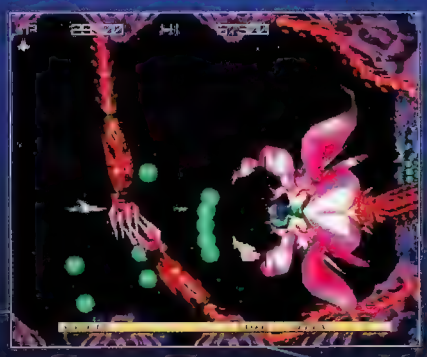
The venerable From Software looks set to finally give us a completely original version of Armored Core, after three, count 'em, three, versions of the original game on PlayStation. More ambitious visually than their first PS2 offering, Eternal Ring, Armored Core 2 should take mission-based mech simulation to a new level.

These screens are from an unfortunately unplayable demo of the game, but already we can see some of the PS2's magic at work. True to other near-launch games, Armored Core 2 doesn't look to be any leap in gameplay, but it should bring a newfound urgency to From's most profitable and popular series. GR

developer **konami**

publisher **konami**

available **april 13 japan**



GRADIUS III & IV

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

Insane 2D shooting lives on! Amid all the beautiful polygon games for PS2, Konami is catering to the old-school gamer with Gradius III & IV, a beyond-arcade-perfect set of two of the most intense, action-packed shooters ever made. Not content with just perfect conversions of the coin-ops, Konami has packed the games with extra features like beautiful FMV scenes, multiple difficulty settings, boss trial fights, a beginner mode for Gradius newcomers, and a sound test to sample what are arguably some of the best tunes ever heard in a video game. Anticipating the PS2's Internet capabilities, Gradius III & IV will even let players upload their scores to a network once PS2's online infrastructure is finished.

The gameplay is madcap shooting bliss. From the demo Konami made available, it's already obvious that the pattern-based sprite-heavy gameplay is just as fun now as it was when Gradius debuted some 15 years ago. Anyone who played Gradius III on the Super NES will be somewhat familiar with the title, but many liberties had to be taken with that conversion, resulting in larger bosses and enemies being altered. All the nasty enemies are in this time, and there wasn't a hint of slowdown or flicker. Gradius IV, based on an arcade game from 1999, looks even better than its predecessor and it's just as wild. Incredibly smooth animation, vibrant scenery and morphing boss characters are just a few of the enhancements. Gradius III & IV is a true treat for shooter fans. GR

PlayStation 2
PS2 DVD
www.gamersrepublic.com

developer **sugar and rockets**
publisher **sony**
available **fall**

I.Q. REMIX

BY MIKE HOBBS

Odd is probably the best word to describe I.Q. Remix, an extraordinarily trippy new version of Intelligent Qube, a surreal puzzle game that swept Japan two years ago. Resembling something from a Terry Gilliam nightmare, you were alone on a bed of cubes, struggling to clear a path through rows and rows of tumbling blocks before they forced you over the edge, or worse, crushed you.

That remains the premise in I.Q. Remix, but the visual updating seems driven by the dreaded lysergic, to the point where this new version is almost difficult to look at. A busy, TV-static-like background is cut by an enlarged silhouette of your character, mimicking your every movement. On top of that, there is a ceaseless motion blur effect going on, and it really does a number on your brain. Unfortunately, a lot of this trickery seems designed to disguise the fact that polygonally, this game is nowhere, with a very simply modeled character and no real background to speak of. GR

developer **konami**
publisher **konami**
available **fall**

SOCCER

BY BRADY HECHTER

So early is this PlayStation 2 nip-and-tuck on Konami's superb International Superstar Soccer, any attempt to paint the game in a positive light would be presumptuous. But this is, after all, a PlayStation 2 game, so on with the enthusiastic guesswork! The game will no doubt be...scratch that...the game *will* be the best-looking soccer game available (if it's not, we've got big problems), and if it just sticks to the ISS blueprint, will represent the sport with unfaltering finesse. I can't wait for this one. GR

developer **from software**
publisher **from software**
available **april japan**

EVERGRACE

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

It's nice to see a Zelda-like adventure title coming for PlayStation 2 so soon after the system's launch. Evergrace, by From Software, puts players into a fantasy world where they control one of two heroes—Yu Terald, a spiky-haired male warrior, or Shala Mi, a female character. Judging from an early version of the game, the action mainly consists of exploring the detailed countryside and eliminating monsters with real-time sword-swinging combat or magic spells. The world of Evergrace is pretty and detailed, with nice stone monuments and an interesting autumn color scheme, but it looks like a game that could have easily been done on Dreamcast. The action is a bit stiff at this point also. It isn't easy to target enemies, and even picking up items can be a bit of a chore. Hopefully Evergrace will evolve into a truly epic adventure. GR

developer **polyphony digital**
publisher **sony**
available **fall**

GRAN TURISMO 2000

BY MIKE HOBBS

If any game is guaranteed to sell systems, it's got to be Gran Turismo 2000. The promise of combining world-class physics and car licenses with the polygon pushing power of PS2 should bring GT fans untold joy when the game is released this year in Japan. And thanks to a one-track demo put out by Polyphony Digital, we've been given a tantalizing glimpse at the future of GT.

The first thing that struck us about GT2000 was the background imagery, which had nothing on Ridge Racer V, at least in this 90-second demo, but boy, are the physics there. The one selectable car, a Mitsubishi Lancer, already felt amazing, with a palpable reality as it vibrated over curbs and as the nose tucked in under hard braking and cornering. The feeling of the suspension working was as good as everyone had hoped, and the analog button feature made its most pronounced showing yet, as we were amazed by the level of control one could have over the severity of braking and acceleration forces applied.

The comparison in background quality against Ridge Racer V isn't meant to suggest that GT2000 looks anything less than spectacular, even if it needed help in a couple of areas-i.e., 32-bit-like cardboard trees. Car models looked very good, if a bit too shiny, and the smaller details were suitably impressive. In third-person view, reflections of painted stripes on the tarmac moved convincingly around the back of the car; in replay mode, an amazing-looking heat haze distorted the distant traffic. And like every PS2 title we've seen thus far, the game moved at a more or less constant 60 fps, something that Sega was not able to achieve with Sega GT, and this is but a demo.

We know the play will be there in GT2000, and all that remains to be seen is just how far Polyphony will be able to push the PS2. GR

FANTAVISION

BY MIKE HOBBS

developer **sony**
publisher **sony**
available **now japan**

The graphical ability of the PS2 is again showing us something new, this time in a very interesting, very beautiful puzzle game built around the simple concept of exploding fireworks. Fantavision is almost nothing more than a showcase for luminous particle effects, but a clever and addictive play mechanic saves it from being just a hardware demo, though it excels at that.

The idea in Fantavision is to link chains of like-colored, undetonated fireworks as they stream upward into the sky. Once a good number are linked together, you set them off, and the screen is filled with blooming particles and the distinctive report of exploding fireworks. It sounds simple, but as the rate of shells increases, so too does the intensity. Power-ups like the Star Mine allow one to get huge combos, and as the screen fills with flashes of light, the power of the PS2 is evident.

But the most visually arresting portion of the game has to be the highly configurable replay mode. A number of different camera angles give amazing views of the fireworks displays, and a host of effects can be activated, from beautiful falling snow and rain, to soft-focus tricks and trippy light-trail shows. Simply watching the camera swing around exploding fireworks as a dense snowfall gives incredible depth to the imagery is an awe-inspiring visual experience. GR

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Although my shiny new PS2 will be collecting dust for a little while, I am totally impressed with the machine's solidity, design, and the way it effortlessly deals with polygons. The PS2 does with ease what I have watched other machines struggle to execute—cutting through the amazing environments in Ridge Racer V as if they weren't even there. It's as if the system is laughing that all it's being asked to do is calculate an entire city. There are a couple moments of distant clip, but otherwise this is the most solid console-based video game I have ever seen, and it's the best racing game I've ever played. I'll of course revel in Tekken and DOA 2, but my beef is that prior to the U.S. launch there are almost no games coming out in Japan that I deeply care about, like a Castlevania, Crash, or Ape Escape sequel. Aside from Sky Surfer and Evergrace, the Japanese side is light on action and adventure—my forte. My time will come in September, though, when the system debuts here and, in the meantime, I've got plenty to keep me busy. I have high hopes for the future, looking forward to games like Ninja Gaiden, and can't wait for E3 to see what has been going on behind closed doors.

Sony has executed their launch with professionalism, grace, and style. From the plain blue box to the tiny blue and green running lights that grace its monolithic design, it's almost like they don't need the big guns yet because they already know that they will realize all of their goals with the PS2 and everything it promises to bring. I'm excited and optimistic, and I feel more honored than ever to be a part of this industry. We've just ushered in a truly spectacular new era in home entertainment. **BY DAVE HALVERSON**

Sony is onto something here. We laughed back in the mid-'90s at the thought of Sony entering the Sega/Nintendo market and hoping to compete. Oh, how the tables have turned. The PS2 has already almost outsold the Dreamcast in about two percent of the time, while the Dolphin suffers delays from its already late launch date. PlayStation 2 stands on the verge of dominance, and there's no reason it's not going to happen.

The best part about first-generation games is that they only hint of the system's full capabilities. Judging by what we've seen so far, I can't even imagine what we'll be getting in two or three years. It's already been established that the PS2 hardware can make your breakfast and do your homework, but the most important thing is for developers to take advantage of that and make games that are fun. Games that not only look sparkling, but play like a dream. Just like with PlayStation, rushed games will inevitably dilute the stream of quality, but I have faith that we'll see some real gems. It couldn't hurt to follow up on classic series' like Castlevania, Mega Man, and Ghosts 'n' Goblins. But that's too much to ask these days.

Minor technical issues aside, Sony has done everything right, but I still can't wait for Dolphin and more great Dreamcast games, and X-Box, to a lesser extent. PS2 is everything I hoped it would be. Who knows what will happen next; I mean, in ten years it could be some company like Chef Boyardee dominating the market. But by then, the PS4 will be out, which is rumored to have the ability to warp space-time at 500 quads per channel. **BY J.A. HAUGEN**

I tried to insulate myself from the electrifying anticipation of the PlayStation 2 launch. It didn't work.

I was in trouble ever since George Lucas exclaimed on "Roger Ebert and the Movies" that Sony's unimaginably powerful system was more advanced than the computers used to create the images in *Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace*. The common sense side of me smiled at the grossly exaggerated statement, but the Sony-infected, hopelessly enthusiastic side of me delighted in the imagining of the wonders that were sure to come from this seemingly boundless technology. After a PS2 cover on *Newsweek* magazine, it was quite apparent that Sony was destined to rule the world and change our perception of video games forever and destroy Microsoft and Sega and Nintendo and any other pathetic attempt at competition.

No wonder I'm disappointed. There was no way this system was going to survive the hype, and while no video game image can come close to the level of sophistication shown in the first crop of games, the PlayStation 2 launch has left me yearning for so much more. But for all the dissatisfaction and questioning, there remains an unwavering enthusiasm for the future, a sense that what we've seen so far is the amateur warm-up act before an unforgettable show. **BY BRADY FIECHTER**

Special thanks to Ryo at Gameland and everyone at Japan Video

PS2 FESTIVAL

BY JUN SAKAI

At the Makuhari Convention Center in Chiba, Japan, SCEI held the PlayStation Festival 2000 to showcase the PS2 to the public from February 18 through 20. Several hundred reporters from TV stations and magazines, as well as visitors from all walks of life, formed a massive line well before the festival opened. Upon opening the gate, people surged toward the booths of exhibitors where 500 PS2 units with numerous playable titles were set up for them to get their first hands-on play. The exhibition area inside the convention center was stylishly decorated to reflect the themes of space (black) and earth (blue), the colors of PS2, and this lent the convention area a somewhat soothing feeling in spite of the crowd.

At one o'clock, President Ken Kutaragi proudly announced, "The most anticipated console in the world is going to be released soon. We will continue to carry over software titles that we nurtured together with our partners to the next generation." In regards to the production of PS2, Kutaragi assured that there were no problems with SCE's production side, and he referred to PlayStation Dot Com Japan, the online direct sales service which opened at noon on the very same day. When one made a purchase online, the prices of the console, games, and peripherals were cheaper. For example, the console was listed online as ¥38,800, down from ¥39,800. Software such as Ridge Racer V and Street Fighter EX3 were priced at ¥5,980, down from ¥6,800. DVD movie titles were also sold at up to $10 less and official PS2 peripherals were 10 percent less. The good news for Japanese gamers was that they could order the PS2 and the games online at a lower price and pick them up on the release day at their nearest convenience store. SCE's marketing and implementation of the plan for the next-generation console seemed destined to succeed. But only one flaw occurred: Their server, which received more hits than it could handle, temporarily crashed. At its peak, the server received more than 400,000 hits per minute, which was a record high for SCE.

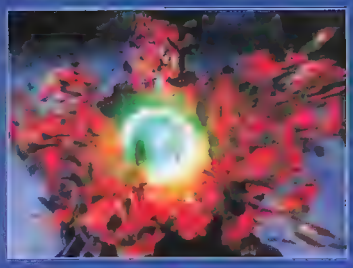
It is interesting to note that the general feeling among investors on the Tokyo Stock Exchange Mar-

ket became very favorable for SCE and their third parties. Stock prices among major PS2 game developers increased by an average of more than 10 percent by the end of the first day.

Aside from the playable games already exhibited at the show, several unexpected announcements regarding future release titles for the PS2 were made. Square and Disney Interactive announced that they were co-developing an action/RPG starring Mickey Mouse, Goofy, and other Disney characters, scheduled to be released by the end of 2001 in Japan, and by 2002 in the U.S. and Europe. Tetsuya Nomura, who is known as the artist for the Final Fantasy series, is primed to assume the art direction, along with other members of various FF staffs. Square president Takeichi-san proudly announced, "By teaming up with Disney Interactive, who has prowess in the creation of contents, and Square, which has the leading technology in game development, we are able to provide unprecedented entertainment." An early demo of a rendered Goofy was already created and displayed at the conference.

As expected, Capcom also made a few exciting announcements. Okamoto-san talked first about the striking Onimusha, a Resident Evil-like game set in feudal Japan, which had already been scooped by some Japanese game magazines. Although only a demo movie was shown, Okamoto-san said, "We are not even maximizing half the performance of PS2...we want to make the game so real that you can feel the sense of slashing someone." Nice.

Online shopping opened together with the combination of countdown TV commercials, sumptuous TV coverage, as well as advertisements in the major publications. SCE successfully delivered consumers the significance of owning the PS2, which led to, as you already know, the resoundingly successful release of the system on March 4, 2000.



Next was Tecmo, and producer Itagaki-san formally announced the release of Dead or Alive 2 on March 30, putting it in direct competition with Namco's Tekken Tag Tournament, due to be released the same day. He booted up the ROM, which had just been burned the very same morning, and demonstrated the game. The smoothness, speed, and movement of body parts were no different from the arcade version—but still impressive.

Ending the festival on a high note was Dark Cloud, an amazingly promising adventure/RPG from SCE. A great feature of the game is that players can create their own world by placing structures, forests, and rivers. In addition, a system called "shuffle dungeon" changes the layout of the dungeons every time you enter.

After the Onimusha demonstration, the release of Maximo was announced to the theme music of Ghost and Goblins. Susumu Matsushita, who is famous for his cover illustrations for *Weekly Famitsu*, is handling the game designs.

Surprisingly, Capcom will be publishing two titles in collaboration with Game Arts, Silpheed and Gun Griffon Blaze, and with Chun Soft, Chen Wen's Sangokushi. And should you think a famous Capcom name may be missing from the list, Okamoto-san also revealed that the company has already started the development of a Resident Evil adventure for the PS2.

Exhibited Titles:

Art Dink *A-Train*
Ascii *Kakinoki Shogi*
ASK *Billiard Master 2*
Astrole *American Arcade*
Enix *Love Story*
EA Square *Super Snowboard Cross*
Capcom *Street Fighter EX3*
Koei *Kessen*
Koei *Mahjong*
Konami *Jikkyo World Soccer 2000*
Konami *Jikkyo Powerful Pro Baseball7*
Jaleco *Stepping Selection*
Square *Driving Emotion Type-S*
Square *Gekikukan Pro Baseball*
SCE *Gran Turismo 2000*
SCE *Fantavision*
SCE *IQ Remix*
SCE *BE ON Edge*
Taito *EX Billiard*
T & E *Golf Paradise*
Namco *Ridge Racer V*
Namco *Tekken Tag Tournament*
From Software *Eternal Ring*
From Software *Evergrace*
Yuki Enterprise *Morita Shogi*

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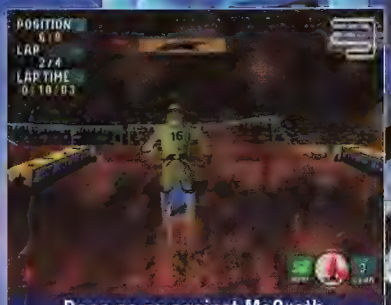

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Sega Dreamcast

NINTENDO64

GAME BOY COLOR

NPG

MCGRATH

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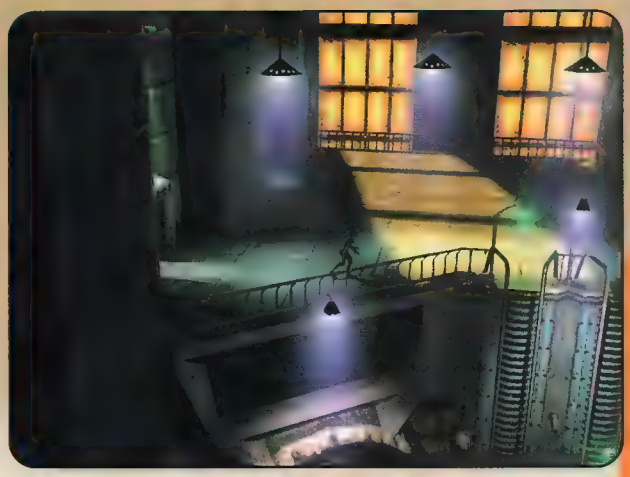
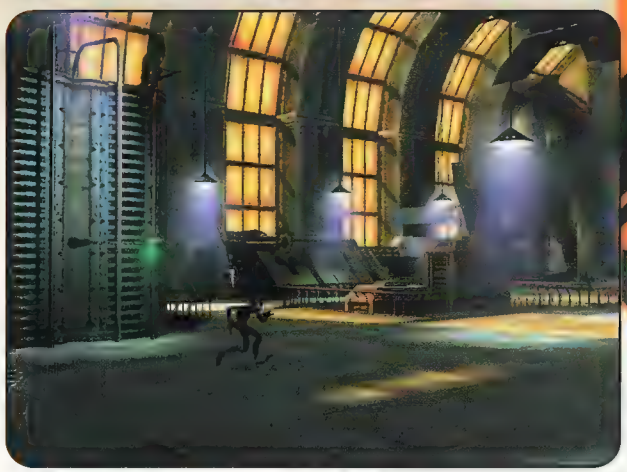
Screenshots shown were taken from the Nintendo 64 version of the video game.

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

BY EDD FEAR

With the recent release of the PlayStation 2 in Japan, and the impending arrival of the new system in the U.S. rapidly approaching, GR has the good fortune of giving you a peek into the development of what will be one of the hottest U.S. launch titles, Oddworld Inhabitants' Munch's Oddysee. We'll be updating the progress of their work with a monthly visit to their busy den. This month: cameras, and the virtual idiot.



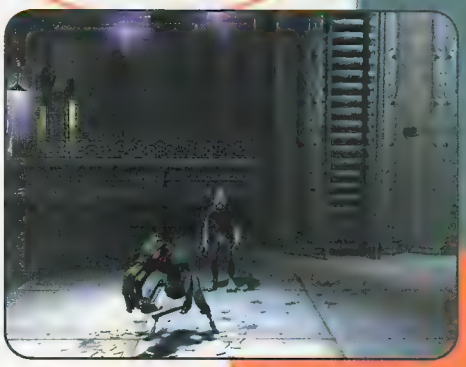


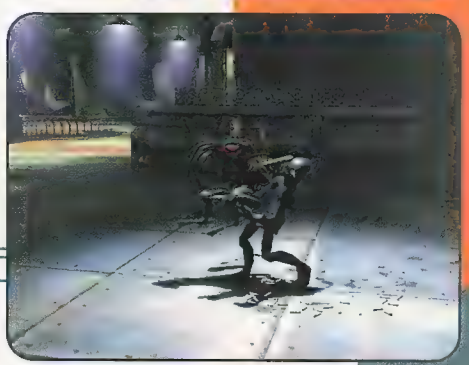
A few days before the launch of the PlayStation 2 in Japan, GR had a chance to visit the San Luis Obispo offices of Oddworld Inhabitants and have a peek at the progress of their groundbreaking PS2 U.S. launch title, Munch's Oddysee. Although the office was sprinkled with monolithic PS2 development systems, these were still recent additions to the landscape, so there were no demos on the new system; in fact, the game itself was still in pieces spread across a dozen or so PCs throughout Oddworld.

What we did get to see, however, was a testament to the vision and talent of the inhabitants of Oddworld. Their promise to us, the loyal fans of Abe and his misadventures, is to broaden the story of the Mudokens, Glukkons, and the like, add many new faces, names, and quests, and deliver it all in full, free-roaming indoor and outdoor 3D, replete with the next generation of GameSpeak and groundbreaking camera mechanics.

In fact, one of the top concerns in converting the Oddworld experience into a 3D environment was the camera system. "We looked at it and said, 'Camera is at the top of the list of problems of free-roaming 3D worlds,'" said Lorne Lanning, president and chief creative force at Oddworld. "That, I think, is the biggest hurdle: just figuring it out. Conceptually, how do you solve this problem? It's a bitch, but then when you figure it out, it's like, BAM! It's the creative that's really challenging, and figuring out how to translate the creative into technical processes that then can be built by engineers, by programmers, and they say, 'Oh, these are the rules you want. I can do that.' Then you start winding up with the solution."

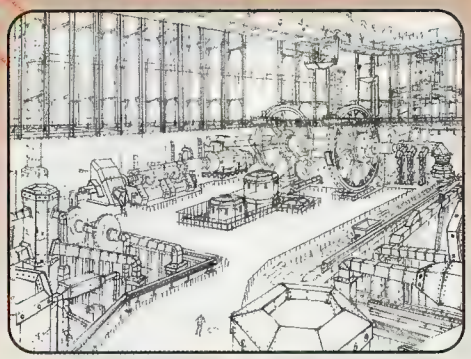
In our visit, we witnessed a sample of the camera system in action, which caused us to comment that it seemed like the Oddworld crew had definitely done their homework, and stand poised to deliver exactly what they've been promising. "Well, we have to," countered Lanning. "You guys don't give anybody any slack. We looked at it and said, what's the number one problem

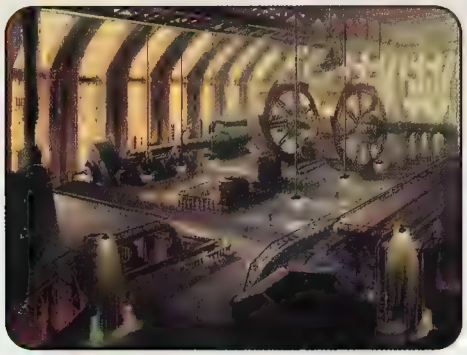


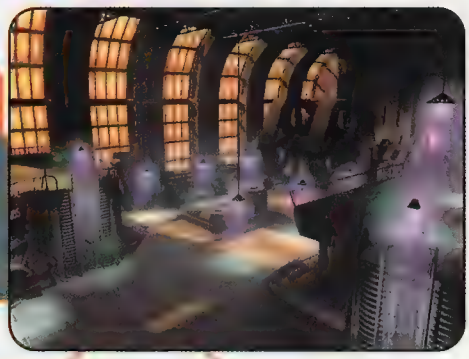


Above: Abe enters the (fully 3D!) factory, and, as in earlier games, heads for the shadows. Right: Abe surveys the slig's patterns (note tracks on the floor and cigarette butts on the floor; these are HINTS) and prepares for disposal.

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS AT WORK ***These shots illustrate the creation of a new environment: initial sketch, artist's color rendering, and final game build.***







in 3D games? The camera. I mean, I get motion sickness. People said, 'Yeah, Zelda's really cool.' Well, I couldn't play it, man. Could not play it. I can't do POVs anymore. Maybe it's because I'm 35 years old, I don't know."

"It also doesn't help that we come from the theme park industry, where we studied motion sickness, we studied inner ear problems, because we were making simulator attractions where, if you don't understand those things, you'd better have a lot of sawdust outside the attraction, because people are going to throw up. If you want an example, go down to Disney World in Florida and ride 'Body-Wars,' done by ILM, and smell the air. You will smell all the vomit and see sawdust everywhere, and it's all because of this bad relationship between image and inner ear."

A considerable amount of time, planning, and programming resources have gone into creating this character-following camera system that is less hands-on and more cinematic than the 3D games of today like Mario, Crash, and Tomb Raider. What they've come up with is a fluid, Hollywood-movie-style camera system following the main character that is built around a series of zones. Within each zone, the camera pans left, right, up, or down as you move your onscreen avatar, and as you move from one zone to another the camera shifts to a new position to let you better observe the area. The Oddworld team has built a tool for tweaking these moves, so that the shifts from zone to zone can be as quick or as slow as the level designers deem necessary to achieve the cinematic feel that the area and action require. And a major part of developing their camera tool (as with all of their programming tools) is the simplicity of tweaking the parameters in order to perfect this cinematic feel.

Lanning describes the camera systems in more detail: "We have two types of camera systems that had to be developed: one that works inside the facilities, which is different from how the one outside works. On the outside, we need to see the whole landscape, and with the other we need to see really specific framing and to give you specific information. So there's two different camera systems built that follow similar philosophies but operate very differently."

To the gamer, however, they will seem the same, because they work with the same principles—to ensure proper framing of the surroundings, whether indoors or outdoors. "Yeah, the camera's a huge problem, and we've solved it," explains Lanning. "We have so much control over our camera system, it's extremely exciting."

The number two problem identified in bringing the Oddworld experience into a 3D environment was what Lanning termed the "virtual idiot phenomenon." In 16-bit side-scrollers, he pointed out, you could pick up items effortlessly. But current 3D games are a different story. "Mario 64 is an example of 3D done really well, and to this day, they still have the best camera in a 3D game, I believe," he said. "In fact, our outside camera operates similar, in principle, to Mario's, but you'll see and feel the difference right away. But, when I wanted to read an information sign, I was going up to it, running into it, and I've gotta go a little this way, or a little that way, but in 16-bit this didn't have the same degree of tedium. It wasn't part of the gameplay, I could just easily get that sign. It wasn't a problem." But the 3D "virtual idiot" doesn't know what your intentions are, it only looks for a narrow field of input and responds only within that area, regardless of what the player really wants.

Lanning continues: "Then the other thing was, you try to walk down hallways—look at Resident Evil—and the character's constantly running against walls. I mean, you're not controlling a life form, you're controlling this virtual idiot. And this virtual idiot doesn't know that he's walking into the wall constantly, and he doesn't know that it's a tight area. A kid can sit down and really get control and navigate pretty well, but most people right off the bat, they're clonking and getting all hung up. So we call that the virtual idiot phenomenon, where we're controlling these little virtual idiots that aren't really aware of their environment, let alone how they feel about it, and all the characters around them, how they feel about each other. We said, what has to happen is, the character has to know where they are, and anything you want to do, whether it's pick something up or look at a sign, shouldn't involve any more tedium than a 16-bit game. It should happen fluidly and naturally and you shouldn't even know the problems we've had to solve to make your experience flow more smoothly." Their answer to these problems is what they jokingly call "cruise control." It's another set of tools whereby the game designers define the relationships between the main character(s) and their surroundings—other entities, walls, trees, or anything else you might come across. "All you'll know is, 'I have total control. I can take this wherever I want,'" said Lanning as he showed off a basic demo. "Then I'm going to turn off cruise control, and then you're going to see the virtual idiot. So we built a whole system to help our characters become smarter in the environments, and they know more of what your intentions are, and you don't notice that they're just doing the right thing."

What we do notice, though, is that the folks at Oddworld are doing the right thing. More details to come in when we visit again next month. **GR**

You can find a full transcription of this month's interview with Lorne Lanning at www.gamersrepublic.com.

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SEGA GT

BY MIKE HOBBS

Sega's latest proves they can do more than arcade racers.

Sega GT takes on the mother of all driving games

It's not often that Sega outright copies another developer's recipe for success, but that's just what they've done with Sega GT, a near-brilliant bid at snatching away at least part of the huge user base of Gran Turismo players. For originality, Sega earns zero points, but in execution, Sega GT just about takes the top prize. And let's face it, gamers would have accepted no less, not with such a superior product already on the shelves setting the de facto standard.

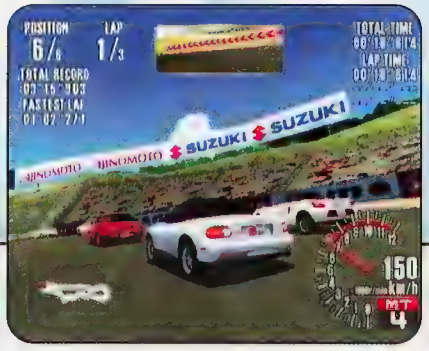
One look at Sega GT's broad strokes leaves little doubt to its inspiration. Licensed cars, thoroughly resolved physics, copious vehicle upgrades, fantastically revealing replays, and slightly tedious driving tests are the hallmarks of Gran Turismo, and they're shamelessly on display here. Sega's one offering of something unique can be found in the so-called Carrozzeria mode, which allows you to create your own car, choosing from a number of different drivetrains and body styles. With "only" 160 licensed cars from Japanese manufacturers (compared with Gran Turismo's 600 global entries), Sega knew they had to add something to the mix besides better graphics.

In a war of numbers then, Sega GT loses out no question. But only the most shallow could accuse the game of being a somehow inferior experience simply because of this. What truly matters is the quality of the play and the quality of the imagery, and Sega GT is the state of the art on Dreamcast.

At the heart of the game is a physics engine that is thankfully not a carbon copy of the one found in Gran Turismo, yet it's one that provides a similar level of sophistication and satisfaction. Most noticeably, cars feel a little looser, a little more alive in Sega GT, as the apparent amount of suspension travel is greater. Especially in the in-car view (the only way to play this particular racer), there is a more pronounced sense of side to side, rolling motion as you attack the corners, and the feeling can be almost breathtaking at times. Indeed, it's exhilarating to drive fast in this game, smooth visuals gusting by.

And the median speed in Sega GT is quite elevated, thanks in part to track design that favors high

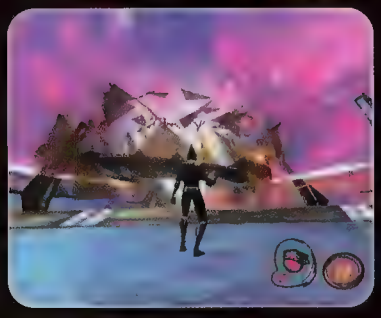
Having far fewer cars than Gran Turismo, Sega GT attempts to fill that void with the Carrozzerria mode. Mixing and matching unique body styles and myriad drivetrain choices, some 20,000 different cars can be made, provided a lifetime of patience, of course. In actual practice, you can make a good 30 to 40 individual creations, and this brings a deeper level of customization to the game beyond the wholesale upgrading of licensed cars.



speed, sweeping corners over tight, technical sections. While this tends to make the courses fairly easy to master, it has the side effect of making the game very enjoyable; you are given ample opportunity to engorge yourself on the feeling of the car as it races around the track. This dynamic also makes for a perfect pairing with the Agetec Rally Wheel, as it is pure joy holding a steady corner at speed with the substantial, black peripheral.

With the play nicely accounted for, graphics must carry the promise of the game to its most satisfying conclusion, and Sega GT simply looks fantastic. A far cry from the schizophrenic frame rate of Rally 2, the engine on display here is amazingly robust, locked at a rock-solid 30 frames per second. Draw-in is almost imperceptible, and the cars themselves are rife with details, one of the best being translucent glass. It's true that Sega GT never knocks your eyes out of their sockets, but the overall visual impression is one of extraordinary polish, and it wins you over through sheer competence of execution. And like all good things, the long-term impression is better than the first.

This look at Sega GT is based on the recently released Japanese version, but apart from some detail changes, this should more or less be the game as it is to be released in September. Here's hoping that SoA doesn't tinker too much, because there's very little wrong as is. But whatever transpires in the localization, rest assured that dynamically, the game will remain true to the Japanese original, meaning that an immensely playable racer is on its way—albeit one that may be competing directly with Ridge Racer V and Gran Turismo 2000, far stiffer competition than the current and near-future crop of DC racers. **GR**



MDK 2

BY DAVE HALVERSON

Can a man, a dog, and a mad professor possibly save the universe?

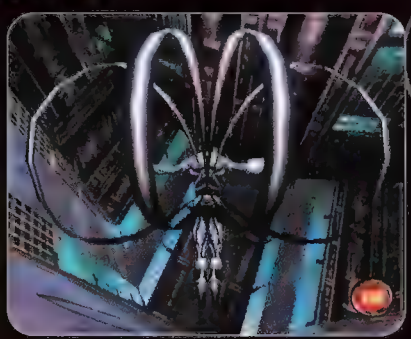
Lucky Dreamcast owners are about to find out

Ever since it graced our front cover, we haven't stopped thinking about Bioware's MDK sequel and when we would finally get our hands on a final version. One of the most imaginative and diverse adventure games ever diabolically devised, it's as close to an out-of-body experience as you're going to get on your Dreamcast. Shiny Entertainment's original premise has undergone a bit of a mutation, picking up more platforming and personality to go with its ingenious brand of hide-and-seek gameplay, but now that all of the components the team planned have been implemented, the big picture is crystal clear: MDK2 is a complete package.

Rarely does a developer achieve everything it set out to, but in this case it seems Bioware has. From the ingenious mini-games leading into each level, to the real-time cinemas that link the adventure together, the game just feels totally refined. Of course, the meat exists in the vast expanses of MDK 2's gameplay. Seldom—well, only once with Jet Force Gemini—has a design that relies on three separate characters actually worked, fusing together three different types of gameplay successfully. But taking MDK2 a step beyond JFG, these three have almost nothing in common, yet they are each equally compelling. Kurt's missions are dominated by extreme shooting, with an emphasis on his ultra zooming capabilities; Max is the master of hardcore corridor shooting and Jet-Pack maneuvers; and the Professor is big on intellectual gameplay.

The common thread linking all three together is the heavy dose of platforming Bioware has injected along with the intense difficulty level. You'd better come to grips with the Turok-style interface quickly, because there's nary a segment when your skills won't be fully taxed. It's well worth the effort, though, because MDK 2 envelopes you in a hostile alien world so well that it's uncanny, and the bosses are well worth the effort it takes to reach their lofty perches.

I would rank MDK 2 among the top three games available for the Dreamcast based on this nearly completed version. Be warned, however, MDK 2 is no walk in the park. Then again, no great games ever are. (Plus, parks can be dangerous places.) We were asked to not review MDK 2 until the board-certified 100-percent final version arrives, so I'll see you one final time on this one with my final grade. **GR**



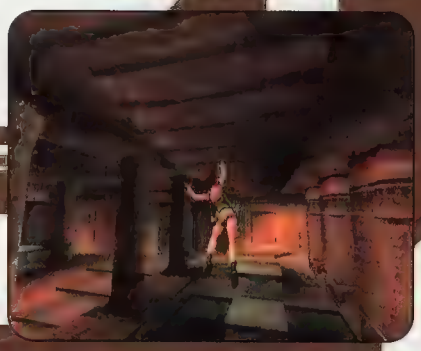
TOMB RAIDER
THE LAST REVELATION

BY BRADY FIECHTER

Had enough of Tomb Raider? Don't answer that until you've played The Last Revelation, a Dreamcast booster shot aiming to energize a fatigued Miss Croft. It may play exactly like the PlayStation version, but this fourth installment in Eidos' never-ending cyber-vision of *Indiana Jones* looks as good as ever.

Credit this to the Dreamcast hardware, which brings to the game the requisite hi-res, polygonal buff and polish. Having been a faithful follower of the Tomb Raider adventures since the very beginning, I'm grateful to finally control a crisp, flowing Lara through clean, solid landscapes. But that's not to say this game is a technical marvel: unfortunately, Eidos chose to transport Last Revelation with as little effort possible, leaving the strengths of Dreamcast untapped, and the end result is visually satisfying but ultimately a bit underwhelming.

It's definitely time for this series to rebuild on PlayStation 2, but until then, and engrossing adventure awaits you on Dreamcast. Playing follow the leader with its predecessors, The Last Revelation drops you in exotic, enormous locales, where a ton of artifacts are yours for the taking as a villain and his cronies track the same complex course. This time Lara is in Egypt, where the spirit of the original game lives strong—ambience and endless exploration take precedence over the action. A few new moves are available, like the rope swing and poll climb, and a laser site can be attached to a weapon for sniping, but durable Tomb Raider mechanics continue to dominate: flip a switch, open a door, find an artifact, explore endlessly . And, of course, swim great depths and make dauntingly long jumps over spikes and gaping pits. Depending on whom you ask, this formula remains potent, despite so few alterations since the series' inception. I say keep it coming. **GR**



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SPIDER-MAN

BY TOM STRATTON

This swinger knows how to get around. If he starts to tingle, chances are...you're in a bad position.

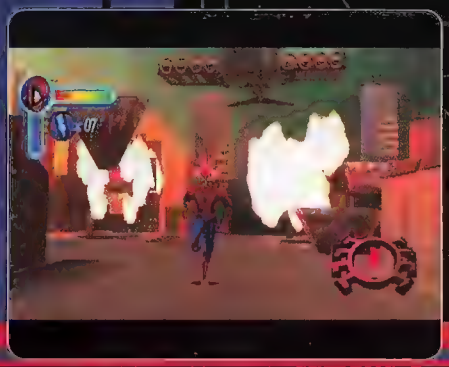
Neversoft's stilted Bruce Willis Apocalypse project suffered from numerous delays, but its effective and efficient game engine has proved to stand the test of time and pay off in prodigious ways, first leading to the foundation of the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater engine. Never could they have predicted the kind of excitement that the fruits of their labor would elicit among gamers. And now that engine is being modified yet again, this time for the enormously promising Spider-man. It just goes to show that the home-grown design studios on the western shores do have something for cynical import-hungry gamers who believe the only true craftsmen come from the land of the rising yen.

The fluidity with which Spider-Man moves is very impressive: he can swing almost anywhere, walk on any surface, and he fights with the grace you'd expect from a two-legged arachnid. Obviously, the game is visually amazing. It looks so good that it doesn't even resemble a PlayStation game. It must puzzle those at SCEA who have been trying to tap into the system in ways only Neversoft seems to be able to. Spider-Man looks better than in any of his other video game appearances. His body shape and many stances, from straight walking to the concerned hunch to the two-hand, two-foot crawl, are all in perfect form. Whether walking on walls or web-slinging , Spider-Man's moves are always amazingly represented.

The game starts out with you simply jumping around the tops of skyscrapers. Spidey has a spider sense and red triangle pointers tell you which direction the enemy is coming from. You can shoot your web *anywhere*, regardless of whether there is actually a building above you. In other words, just like the comic book, the web sort of hits this invisible, magic ceiling that enables Spidey to always employ his web swing.

Black Cat is in the game, and shows up as a guide throughout all eight levels, helping you to understand each of the controls. The levels are broken up into sub-missions. The ones we were shown and played included a stealth mission, in which you break into a building to save hostages and destroy a time bomb before it blows you up; and a straightforward timed mission, in which you must get from one skyscraper top to the next before time runs out, a typical Spider-Man comic book adventure scenario.

Spider-Man can punch and kick his enemies or shoot them with webbing. New moves include Web fists that do more damage than regular punches. Spider-Man can also shoot out his webbing and then pull the enemy in for an uppercut, and he can shoot out Web balls, which are essentially projectiles. And then there is the web-dome, a time-sensitive protective dome that protects Spidey from incoming projectiles, and, if an enemy comes in for an attack, the dome works like a punch or kick, knocking them flat on their



backs. Last but not least is Spidey's stealth attack. If he sneaks up on somebody, he can pounce on them and crack them in the head a few times or bunny kick them into a wall or off a ledge.

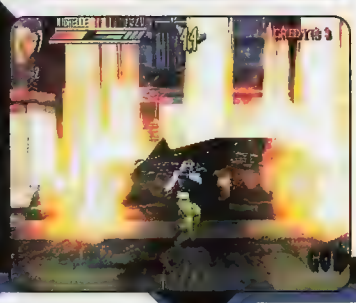
The preview disc we received holds only one boss character. It involves a full-on fight with Scorpion, who is huge and greatly detailed. He fires an electric-type homing spark if Spidey tries to stay away by clinging to the ceiling, as well as a nasty sting from his poisoned tail. The scenario shows J.J. Jameson trapped in his office with Scorpion at the Daily Bugle. Spider-Man has to save J.J., who has a life meter of his own, before Scorpion takes him down. Jameson screams, "I called for the cops, and I get Spider-Man?" in classic form. He's chewing on his signature cigar and, even better, in the corner of his office, a television displays Officer Dick, assuming the position. J.J. definitely knows his games.

Spider-Man takes the player through so many gameplay styles, sequenced play mechanics and level objectives, it is hard to imagine the game will become passe or monotonous through the eight lengthy levels Neversoft is set to deliver. The action evolves from slow, deliberate situations to non-stop fly-by-the-seat-of-your-tights bedlam.

It is yet to be revealed whether Peter Parker will make an appearance, or if Spidey will use his camera to help clear the ill-reputation J. Jonah consistently spreads about the friendly neighborhood man-spider. Whatever comes about in the final version of the game, I am willing to bet it will stand as one of the top games to own out of the 500-plus titles the PS has to offer. **GR**

GEKIDO

BY DAVE HALVERSON



Gekido—Urban Fighters is shaping up to be the Streets of Rage the PlayStation almost never had. Where Core's Fighting Force fell way short, N.A.P.S. Team has filled the bill with a polygonal 2D beat-'em-up that combines the best elements from a dying genre with enough new ideas to make it fly. By combining comic book character designs with moves reminiscent of Sega's classic, a distinctly Asian look, and cinematic overtones, they have sculpted one of the most dynamic beat-'em-ups in recent memory. Whether or not the world will give a damn remains to be seen. Music, a key ingredient since Yuzo Koshiro set the standard with Streets of Rage, was missing from our previewable disc, but let's hope they bless the proceedings with something memorable and not the headache-inducing racket so prevalent in today's American-bred games. If I hear Offspring or anything close, I'm chuckin' the disc.

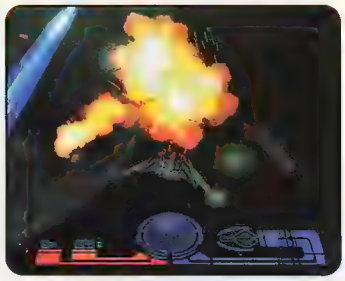
Instantly recognizable whether you choose Arena fighting or Urban mode, is the extraordinary polygon look the team has achieved. The city—basked in neo-Tokyo influences ala *Wicked City*, *Akira*, etc.—is richly detailed and layered. Parked cars have collision on all three sides, power cables stretch into the foreground, banners sway in the wind, and just about everything on the ground can be picked up and thrown. The action itself is paced at around double the speed of Streets of Rage or Final Fight, and there are usually five or six enemies onscreen. They don't just stand around waiting for their turn to get pummeled either; in fact, the AI is so astute that, if you perform a sweeping kick, they'll usually jump over it. Every button on the pad comes into play, making for a steep learning curve but a sizeable payoff. Each character has a bevy of moves at his or her disposal, including two different supers, the ability to create combos, low and high kicks and punches, jumping, blocking and throwing.

Initially, four characters are selectable with an additional two to open up. Travis is the orthodox street fighter, Michelle is the nimble female, Tetsuo is the kung fu fighter, and Ushi is the strong but slow brawler. As for play choices, up to four can pound it out in Arena mode, or you can have at it Urban-style in a classic level-by-level Streets of Rage-like assault with bosses at the end of each sector.

I usually go back to Streets of Rage 2 or 3 when I get the urge for a good old fashioned beat-'em-up, and if I really want a dose of the old 2D brawler, I'll whip out Mutation Nation for the Neo Geo. Perhaps Interplay will leave PlayStation owners with a similar tribute as we inch ever closer to entirely new genres. **GR**

STAR TREK INVASION

BY MIKE HOBBS



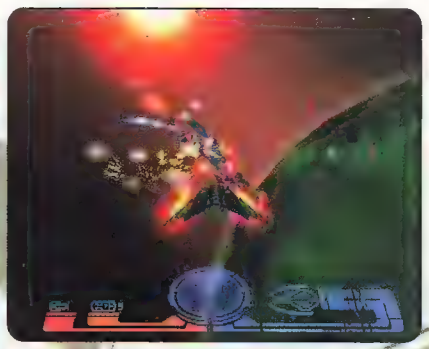
A dearth of exciting Star Trek games leaves the gates wide open for Activision and Warthog's latest. Think Colony Wars.

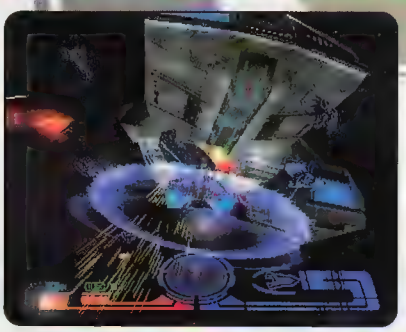
There's not much to recommend the dreadful Star Trek Voyager, as week after week, hungry and deprived Trek fans are subject to the most dully crafted cast of space-farers the long-running saga has had to contend with. Thankfully, Activision will attempt to bring some life to the Star Trek franchise with this decidedly action-oriented 3D shooter for PlayStation.

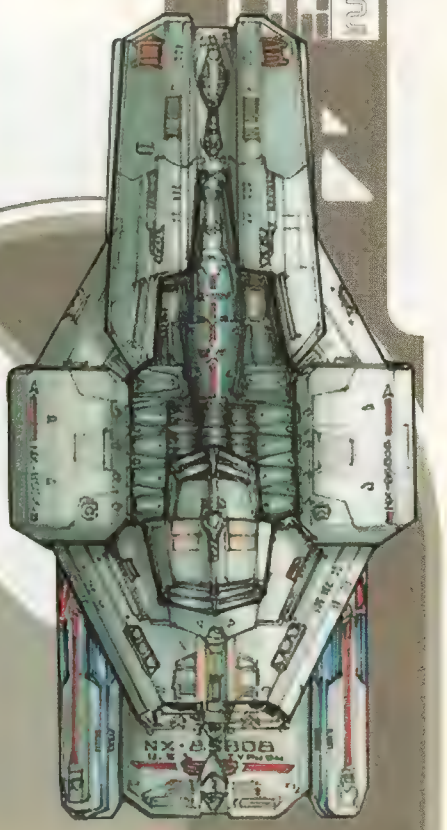
Bearing a more than passing resemblance to Colony Wars (not the least bit surprising considering that some of Warthog's staff are former Psygnosis employees), Star Trek: Invasion puts you at the controls of small Federation fighters as you blow up assorted Trek villains, including the dreaded Borg. As required, the game is rich in the colorful, deep space imagery and fiery explosions that have become this genre's visual calling cards, and the soundtrack is up to task as well, with a rousing symphonic score pounding away behind the action. It's a pity, however, that there aren't recognizable Star Trek cues laced throughout the music.

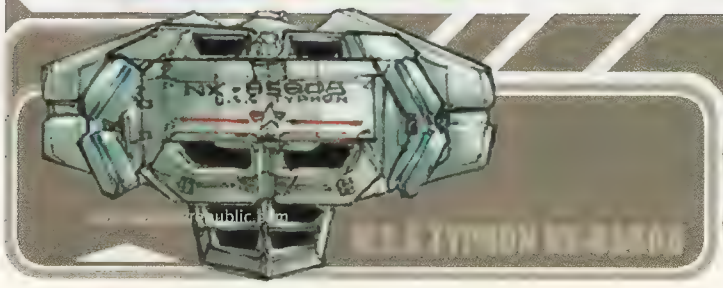
And this brings me to the one criticism I have of the game thus far. As there won't be anything here that you probably can't get in Colony Wars, it's a little curious to me why Star Trek: Invasion doesn't actually pay more homage to the series that inspired it. One could walk past this game and not have a clue that it's based on Star Trek. There are touches like the interface that are pure next-generation Trek, and you'll encounter the occasional Borg cube, but your various ships for instance don't really resemble anything from the series. Where's a Defiant-class vessel, or even a standard-rate shuttle craft? As it stands, the game is running the risk of failing to appease the wants of the very fans it seems to be designed for.

Geeky concerns aside, Star Trek: Invasion is at least taking shape as a solid Colony Wars clone, and there isn't exactly an abundance of these sorts of games on the PS. And take this prediction to heart: you will almost certainly have more fun with Star Trek: Invasion than any typically lame episode of Voyager. **GR**









TENCHU 2
BIRTH OF THE ASSASSINS

BY J.R. HAUGEN

Disembowling people on the fly may not seem like your cup of tea, but that's the name of the game in Tenchu 2

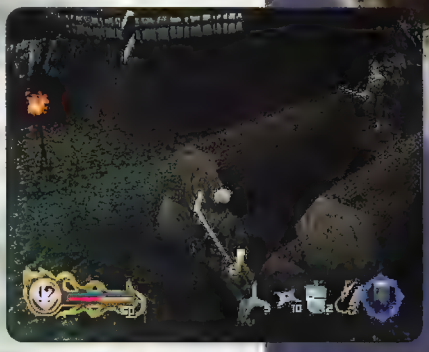
There was a game way back when for the Genesis called The Immortal, whose primary selling point was that there were over 30 different ways to die. This is immediately what came to mind playing the original Tenchu, with your character disposing enemies by slitting their throats, severing limbs, and all sorts of other methods. Such a game deserves a sequel.

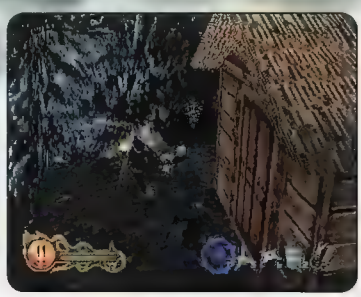
Tenchu 2 - Birth of the Assassins will provide all the first had to offer and more. Although taking place four years earlier than the last game, the focal element is still pussyfooting around in efforts to assassinate people for your master. In addition to that, you will receive special objectives like guarding your master's palace or stopping enemy invasions. The faithful grappling hook is back, along with the other special tools, and now you can choose from new ones like a blowgun, exploding arrows, and invisibility. You also get a whole new set of skills to employ. You can set traps. You can swim, allowing you to take out your opponents from below. You can even pick up your victims' corpses and drag them away to hide them from patrolling sentries.

While Tenchu: Stealth Assassins was fun but somewhat short, the sequel more than makes up for it. As before, you can choose to play the strong, slower Rikimaru, or the small, stealthy Ayame, but now there is a mysterious third character, and all three of them have at least eight unique missions each, compared to the ten total from the first one.

Graphically, Tenchu 2 promises to step up the original's already fine look, almost doubling draw-in distance, increasing the resolution, and having more detailed environments. Missions can take place during day or night, under varying weather conditions. The blood of dispatched warriors who fall into the water slowly diffuses throughout, which is quite a nice touch.

If you're into stealthy yet brutal killing (and who isn't these days?), Tenchu 2 is one you'll want to watch out for. **GR**



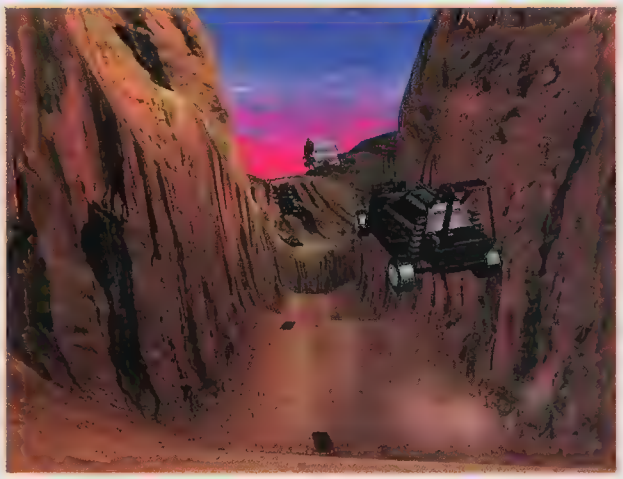


TEST DRIVE OFF-ROAD 3

previewed by m hobbs • dev: player one • pub: infogrames • avail: june

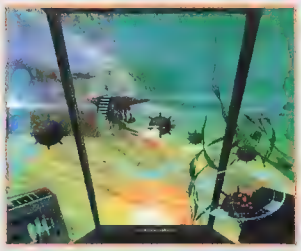
Another month, another Test Drive game. This time around, it's the Dreamcast version of Test Drive Off Road 3, with Player One handling the conversion duties. Featuring all the levels from the PS version along with a good selection of licensed vehicles like Nissan Pathfinders and Ford Explorers, the game's rough-and-tumble play should find a welcome home on Dreamcast. In addition, Test Drive Off Road 3 will have music from Eve 6, Incubus, and Leech.

The game is currently slated for a June release; let's hope Player One delivers a stronger game than their last conversion, Roadsters for DC, which saw them losing the plot a bit. GR



DEEP FIGHTER

previewed by m hobbs • dev: criterion studios • pub: ubi soft • avail: summer



This is something new for the Dreamcast: an aquatic, mission-based shooter. Deep Fighter, from developers Criterion Studios, puts you at the helm of various high-tech subs as you struggle to stave off the attacks of menacing pirates and undersea creatures while your people complete the construction of a new mothership, the Leviathan. When this transport is complete, a safe haven can found, and all will be right with the world.

Most surprising about Deep Fighter initially is its use of live-action FMV. Though it's still in an unfinished, blue-screen form in this preview version, I was reminded of how rare the use of live actors has become. This, combined with the mission-based nature of the gameplay looks to lend Deep Fighter a vaguely Wing Commander-like feeling, albeit one with a completely different setting.

Using the power of the Dreamcast, Criterion has crafted a convincing underwater world, using the sea's inherent limited visibility to keep frame rates high and detail solid. Fish swim about everywhere (and can be blown to bits), and you can even come up to the surface for a quick look around.

Ubi Soft plans to release Deep Fighter this summer, and we'll bring you further details next month. GR

AIDYN CHRONICLES

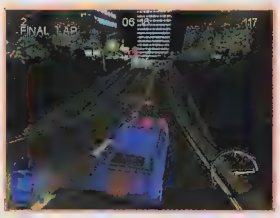
previewed by d halverson • developer: h2o • publisher: th•q • available: summer

TH•Q hasn't given up on the 64 and are set to release the first and last turn-based RPG for the RPG-less console this summer. With a design team lead by Chris Klug, who scribed the "DragonQuest" pen-and-paper game for TSI, H2o's Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage promises to fill the void before Nintendo puts their last cart muncher out to pasture. The game revolves around an orphan boy, Alaron, who is raised by a Duke as a castle squire. Poisoned by Goblins while out patrolling one fateful day, his only hope lies in the journey herein.

The game harbors all of the RPG essentials: four characters travel in your party; there are heaps of items to buy, sell and trade; realistic weather effects like rain and fog; and the Ram Pak makes it all perty. There's a laundry list of cool stuff that we'll get to as soon as we can put fingers to buttons—that is, as soon as these blisters heal! GR

DEMOLITION RACER: NE

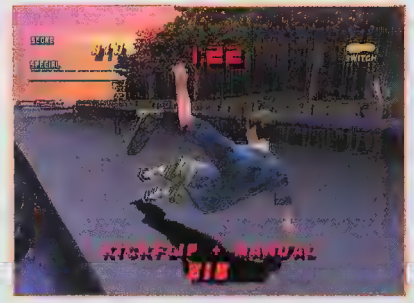
previewed by m hobbs • dev: pitbull syndicate • pub: infogrames • avail: summer



As rich as the Dreamcast's racing library is, it has yet to get a Destruction Derby-style game, until now. Infogrames' Demolition Racer: No Exit will be an enhanced version of the currently available PS and PC version. Now, all the fun of demolishing fellow competitors will be brought to you looking better than ever. Along with the expected upgrades in image quality, nine new cars, new power-ups like a Nitro Boost, and two exclusive Dreamcast courses have been added, making the game more than just a straight conversion. Let's just hope that developers Pitbull Syndicate have advanced the state of their technology over Test Drive 6 for Dreamcast. Demolition Racer: No Exit is due this summer. GR

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

previewed by t stratton • developer: neversoft • publisher: activision • available: fall



With Neversoft again at the helm, this highly anticipated sequel to 1999's best sports game of the year is heading towards a fall 2000 release. With the most comprehensive roster of pro skaters, an intuitive control scheme, and enhanced skating physics, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 will deliver the most authentic and cutting-edge skateboarding experience available, while expanding on the groundbreaking features of the original game.

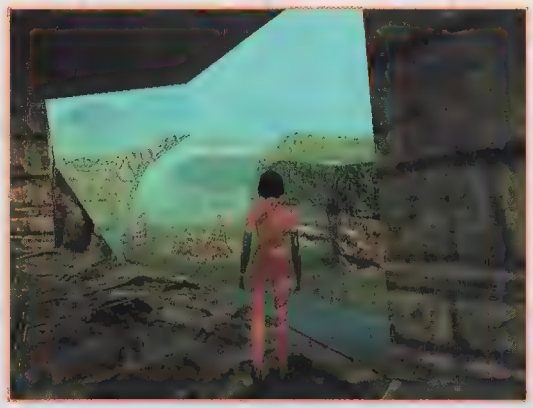
The sequel's increased number of tricks and combinations—including new grabs, grinds, inverts and lip and Nollie tricks—will challenge players to master new skills as they work their way up the skateboarding ranks. Adding depth and replayability to the game is the most advanced Skatepark editor to date, allowing players to build their own dream parks from scratch. Players can see exactly how their park will look in the game as they plot out a course using a variety of parts—ramps, rails, obstacles and quarterpipes—in a real-time 3D editor. Once a level is laid out it can be saved to a memory card and shared with friends, putting them to the test. Additionally, a total character customization feature allows gamers to modify the pro skater's clothing, physical appearance and trick sets, or build an entirely new character from scratch.

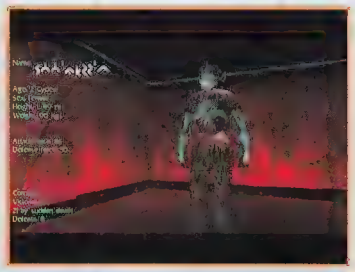
Players can ollie and grind in a variety of new international real-world settings, including skate parks and locations in New York, Marseilles, and Rio de Janeiro (I betcha' Bob had something to do with that). And like in the original, each environment is littered with secret areas, short cuts, ramps and interactive objects allowing players to trick off of just about everything in sight.

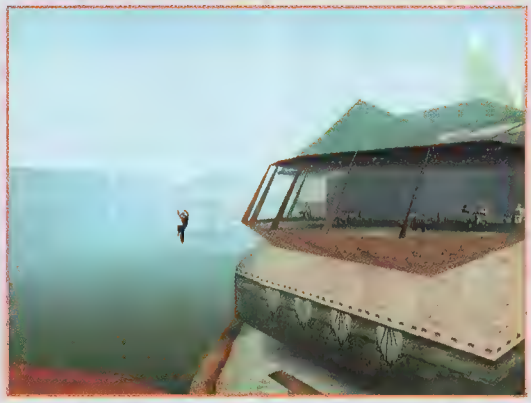
Offering several modes of play, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2's two-player split-screen Trick Attack mode gives skaters the ability to interact with other players. Bet you can't guess which game I'll be hunting down at E3. GR

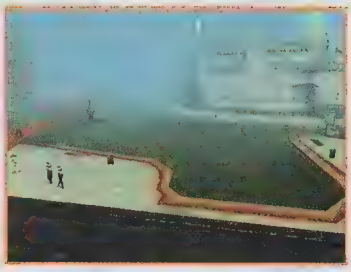
OMIKRON

previewed by j.r. haugen • developer: quantic dream • publisher: eidos • available: may









The Dreamcast is soon to be deluged with go-anywhere-do-anything games. Well, maybe not deluged, but with Shenmue already on the console, Omikron, which came out late last year for PC, is going to make the genre a little more crowded. You begin the game in the role of yourself, and are transported to a *Blade Runner*-esque alternate dimension to uncover an unfolding mystery. The means to that end is where the game really begins. When you die, your soul gets reincarnated into the person you touched last. Sometimes the identity you assume is pivotal to the story, other times it is just for giggles. Knowing who you are controlling is important, as certain tasks cannot be accomplished with the inappropriate character.

One thing that should always be associated with Omikron is David Bowie, who partly created the techno-industrial soundtrack and even stars in it as a rock star. His wife Iman also chimes in, as a futuristic bounty hunter. Those are just two of the hundreds of characters you'll interact with along the way. The sheer size of the game could present problems for the Dreamcast hardware, which, suffice it to say, isn't as equipped as a PC to handle such massive amounts of data. If Eidos has to cut corners, there could be problems, but we'll find out how they're handling it in the coming months. GR

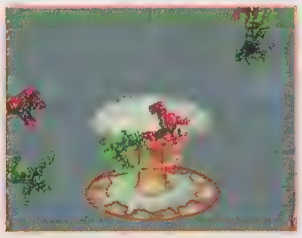
SPEEDBALL 2100

previewed by d halverson • developer/publisher: bitmap bros • available: may

Anybody out there remember Speedball for the Amiga or Speedball 2 for the Genesis? Bueller... Bueller...

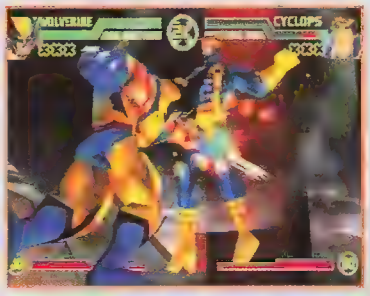
Ahem, well, it was all the rage in cyber sports back then and if the Bitmap Bros. have it their way, it will emerge once again and capture the hearts of a new generation of gamers hungry for the violence that only hurling steel balls can bring.

The game itself is rather simple. Two teams cream each other like human rag dolls over a metallic ball that must be deposited in to the opposing goal to score. The fun is in the execution. The square-jawed warriors that play this ultra violent sport of the future feel no pain and kick the living crap out of each other to get the job done. Polys have replaced sprites, but otherwise this is pretty much the game of lore. GR



X-MEN: MUTANT ACAD.

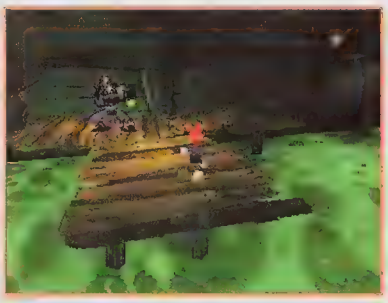
previewed by c hoffman • dev: paradox • pub: activision • avail: july



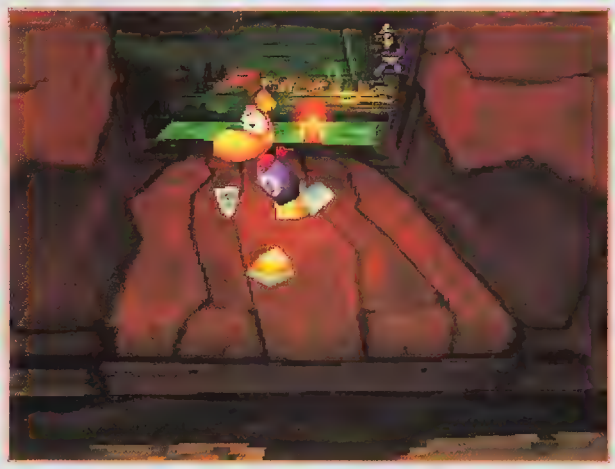
Activision's mutant fighting game, X-Men: Mutant Academy, has some pretty big shoes to fill. After all, the last X-fighter came from the masters at Capcom. Fortunately, Mutant Academy stands as a competent and promising polygonal fighter. Ten favorites from the comic are playable here: Cyclops, Wolverine, Storm, Gambit, Beast, Jean Grey, Mystique, Sabretooth, Toad, and Magneto. Each one comes loaded with their famous powers and around 45-60 moves. Mutant Academy actually plays a bit like Capcom's fighters. It feels like a 2D fighter, and even a few moves resemble Capcom's, like Cyclops' flash kick. However, the 3D graphics allow for some dynamic camera work during special moves and throws. Fans should be pleased to know that the characters will appear in both their classic comic attire and in costumes inspired by the upcoming movie, 10 comic-based arenas will be included, and the game will be packed with comic covers, movie trailers and more in the Cerebro mode. GR

RAYMAN 2

previewed by b fiechter • developer/publisher: ubi soft • available: summer



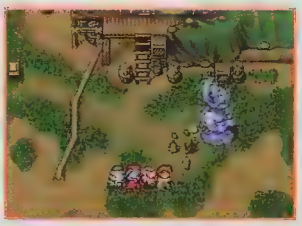
The good: the magnificent Rayman 2 can now be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of what console they own. The bad: Rayman 2 on PlayStation cannot possibly match the visual heights reached on the Nintendo 64 and Dreamcast versions. But comparisons aside, Rayman 2 on Sony's aging system is a game alive with traditional platforming gameplay—something of a rarity in today's game design. GR

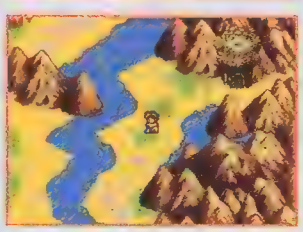


LUNAR 2: ETERNAL BLUE

preview by j.r. haugen • dev: game arts • pub: working designs • avail: summer

The release of Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete on PlayStation brought the series out of the coma it has been languishing in since it was on the Sega CD. Thanks to Working Designs, the same treatment is being applied to Eternal Blue, as it will come with three game CDs, a soundtrack CD, a making-of CD, and other unspecified goodies that are sure to make it a jewel in your RPG trove. The game itself hasn't been retooled as much as the first, as it will follow the Sega CD version much more closely. And because you shouldn't wait until spring to play it, an eight-hour demo will be included with Vanguard Bandits. GR



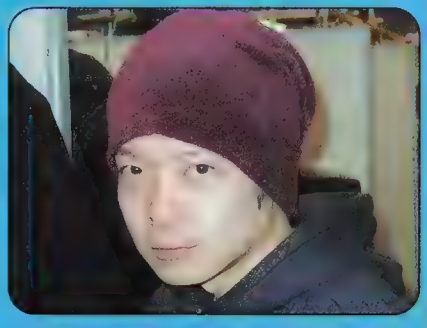


AN INTERVIEW WITH SUPERMAGNETIC NEO DEVELOPERS

GENKI

BY DAVE HALVERSON

Feeling partly responsible to get the word out on one of the few real platformers out there—a game you should endeavor to conquer within the span of your gaming life to give you the wisdom and fortitude for the road ahead—we turn our gaze to the minds behind the magic that is Super Magnetic Neo. U.S. Segaphiles are always barking about sequels, and now here's our chance to make a difference. Step up to the plate, people; we want another one of these!



GR: A game like SMN requires that you first invent a universe. In SMN's case it turned out to be an amusement park. Tell us about this process and how you came up with the overall story.

Genki: First of all, because it's a platformer, we didn't think it was necessary to place a lot of weight on the story. Personally, I think that a story is totally unnecessary for a platformer.

The game is set in an amusement park primarily because it gives us an excuse to make a bunch of objects that are physically impossible in their design and movement. Then we can say, "Those objects exist because they're in an amusement park!" Don't you think that's more persuasive than just saying, "Oh, those characters and things only work because it's a game"?

GR: Okay, now, let's talk about the character design. What inspired our little magnetic friend's look?

Genki: Neo came about as a result of our trying to design a character that would physically embody magnetic characteristics while also responding with appropriate control reactions. He was actually designed by everyone involved on the production team. The animators, programmers, graphic designers and game producers all gathered together to designed Neo with the understanding that a game character needs more than just a visual look. Neo's design is not just about the graphics but a mixture of a lot of other ideas as well.

GR: What made you decide to develop a platformer in the first place? Might SMN become a Genki franchise similar to Sonic for Sega and Crash for Sony? The game certainly begs for a sequel!

Genki: A sequel? It would be great if we could make a sequel, but that will depend on how well the game sells, I guess.

We began this project for a number of reasons. We had a relatively young staff at Genki working on this particular title. It basically started because we wanted to explore a genre that we'd never worked in before, rather than develop the typical driving simulation or 3D shooting games that we're known for. Neo turned out to be a traditional platform game because they (the staff members) felt that the simple yet deep game design of a platformer had a freshness all its own. There are so many games that are complicated and intricately designed, to the point that sometimes we can't even define their genres, but I think that Neo is a self-defined answer to the question, "What is a game?"

GR: How many people were on the SMN team and how long did the game take to make?

Genki: If we were to include the time we spent working on the game in the very beginning, this game took a very long time to finish. However, once we finally decided on the specific direction we were pursuing, it took about a year to complete. There were about 18-20 staff members who came up with and worked on the final version of the game. In reality though, a lot more people worked on Neo throughout the life of the project.

GR: What are your thoughts on Dreamcast now that you have two games under your belt?

Genki: I think that the Dreamcast is good hardware. There are a lot of great things that it can do if we dig deep enough. I look forward to seeing networked games on the system.

GR: You obviously decided to make this a very challenging and replayable game aimed at the old-school, more-experienced gamers. Can you comment on this?

Genki: We think it's possible for developers to communicate with players through the difficulty of a game. We felt it would be too much to have the stereotypical, eager-to-help-the-player clues, like notes or signs in the game or characters telling players what to do. What we want to do is bargain with players through the process of conquest. Staff members spent long hours working on game balance. The goal was to communicate, not through written words, but through Neo's body movements. As the result, SMN became a very challenging game. We

Above: Some of the members of the Genki team responsible for Super Magnetic Neo (top to bottom): Gaku Tamura, lead designer and director; Shunsuke Kabasawa, the designer responsible for Neo's overall design; and Nobuyuki Nakano, who pioneered the magnetic gimmicks and designed the challenge/training mode.

think that this is a great aspect of the game. If possible, we want to spend even more time balancing the game. We feel more can be done. Our ultimate goal is to continue bargaining with players through the game's difficult levels.

GR: The play mechanics are simple yet complex and make for some of the most intuitive gameplay we've experienced in some time. How did you come up with the red/blue magnetic fields aspect of the game?

Genki: The simpler the controls, the better. We were looking for a simple concept, one that would be known by everyone, so we came up with magnets. The magnet is an attractive idea to use because everyone has some knowledge about it. We devised simple rules that used anode/cathode (red and blue) and made them correspond to the red and blue buttons on the controller. By keeping it simple, we thought that we could make it easier for players to get into the game quickly.

GR: What games inspired your level design? There seems to be some similarities with Crash Bandicoot.

Genki: We looked at many platform games to help us adjust the difficulty level of SMN. As far as the game system is concerned, games with any type of written (or spoken) explanations of the game didn't inspire us. In this sense, I think the Super Mario series are excellent games.

GR: Were you considering a western audience when you developed SMN?

Genki: We were considering the western audience, but we didn't make the game with a focus on them. We think if difficulty and conquest can be a common language, then the game will be understood regardless of the player's nationality. At least, we certainly hope so.

GR: Is there an award for collecting every rat skull icon and beating all of the bonus rounds?

Genki: Yes, but you need more than the rat skull icons, you have to beat the best time and find hidden items in a level to get an award. You collect all of the awards for the complete ending... well, you'll just have to play it yourself to see what's coming. There's no award for beating all of the bonus rounds.

GR: We feel SMN is one of the best looking and best playing Dreamcast games yet and so of course we must ask that you produce a sequel. Is there any chance of this happening ?

Genki: Your wish is everything. If this game sells well in the U.S., then we certainly will make a sequel.

We want to see Neo return to Japan, after he's sold successfully in the U.S.

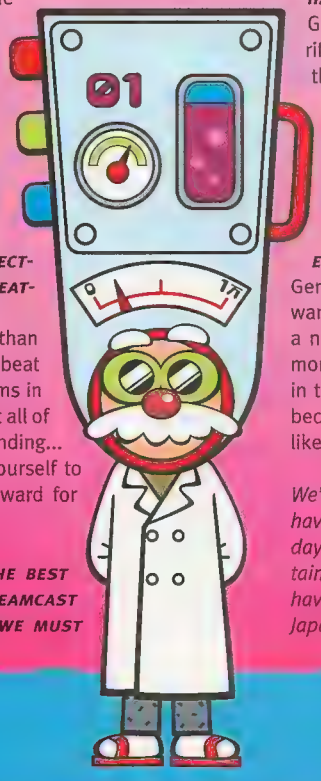
GR: You have the entire game running at 60 frames per second. Was this easy to accomplish or did you have to make sacrifices?

Genki: There are many things that were sacrificed, in order to maintain 60 fps. The biggest was in terms of the development time...to have extraordinary results, you have to go through tough times. Regardless of the sacrifices we made, maintaining 60 fps was our top priority. For the amount of time we had to work with, we did our best to minimize the number of slow downs.

GR: And finally, with regard to the character's Japanese name, does Niuniu mean anything?

Genki: When we were originally designing the character, we wanted him to have a soft look and movement style. We wanted a name that resembled that softness. Also, in order to focus more attention on the lead character we wanted to put his name in the title. So we decided on the title Super Magnetic Niuniu because it has both the character name and the sound that we liked.

We'd like to thank everyone at Genki, for this interview and for having the sacks to make a game that hearkens back to the days of Ninja Gaiden. It felt great to be challenged and entertained simultaneously for a change. Thanks to Crave as well for having the fortitude to localize the Dreamcast's first old-school Japanese platformer. **GR**



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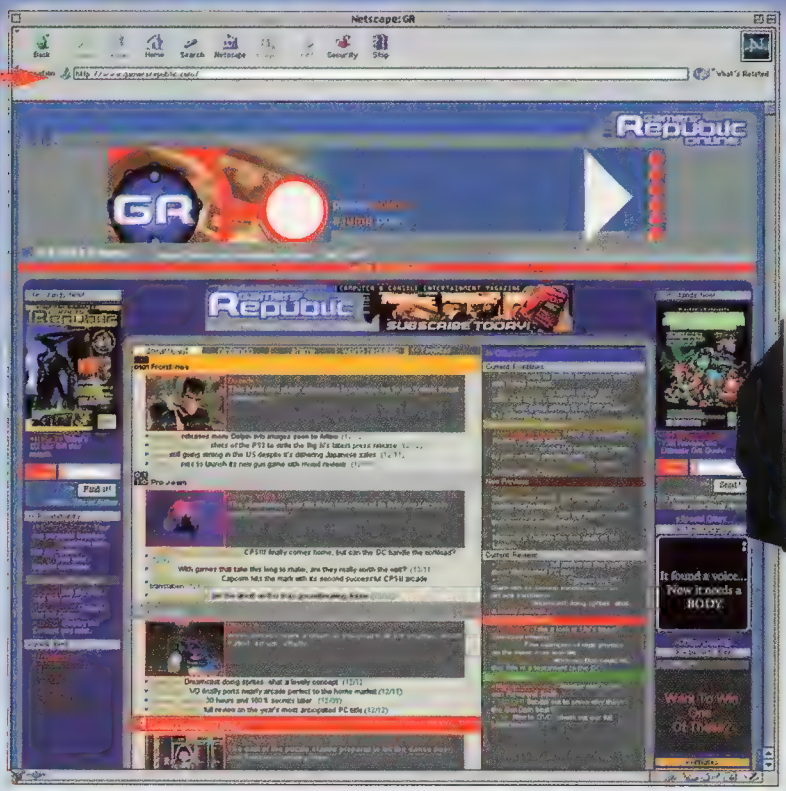

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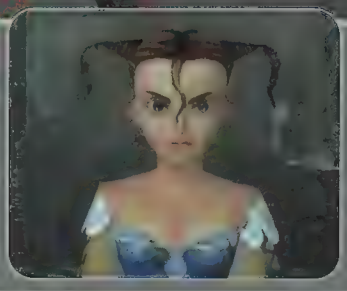
Gamers' Republic REVIEWS

GAME OF THE MONTH

SWORD OF THE BERSERK Guts' Rage

developer: yuke's
publisher: eidos



GAMES REVIEWED THIS ISSUE

Domestic Reviews

Alundra 2	PS	B+
Astro Trooper Vanark	PS	B
Battlezone: ROTBD	N64	C+
Eagle One	PS	B-
Galerians	PS	B
Gauntlet Legends	PS	C+
Gundam 0079	DC	C+
Jeremy McGrath 2000	N64	C+
Magical Racing Tour	PS	D+
Maken X	DC	B+
Medievil 2	PS	B+
Mr Driller	PS	B-
Speed Punks	PS	B
Strider 2	PS	B+
Sword of Berserk: GR	DC	A-
Syphon Filter 2	PS	A-

Import Reviews

Aero Dancing F	DC	C+
Gun Bird 2	DC	B
The Ring	DC	C+
Virtua Cop 2	DC	B

Sports Reviews

High Heat Baseball 2001	PS	B
NASCAR Rumble	PS	B
NHL 2K	DC	B
Rock the Rink	PS	C+
Sammy Sosa Softball	PS	C+
Street Sk8r	PS	C+
Triple Play 2001	PS	B+

Handheld Reviews

Metal Slug 2nd Miss.	NGPC	A-

MAKEN X

BY BRADY FIECHTER

Devilishly slick character designs and a unique combat system pump fresh energy into the FPS genre

Unrelenting in its action, freakishly stylized, constructed from all the components needed for an exciting first-person action game, Maken X is a rare but successful Japanese interpretation of the book of Doom. The game begins in an underground laboratory, where an artificial lifeform is seen pulsating behind a glass tube. This engineered wonder of modern science feeds off the energy of the human mind, consuming its host to do its bidding. Known as Maken, the entity transforms into a malevolent sword, which fuses to any victim it chooses, sending his soul into what is called the dimension of psi.

Of course, technology like Maken is bound to attract a diabolical adversary who wants nothing less than to rule the world and precipitate World War III. Bummer for Earth. Glory for you, because now you get to travel the globe and dispose of coolly bizarre enemies with a multitude of large and really sharp blades.

Your first mission is through the spirit of a young girl named Kay, who is driven not only by world-savior intent but by the desire to find her father, the genius scientist who is kidnapped because of his ultimate knowledge of Maken. Kay's psi, which is essentially her soul, is inextricably bound to Maken, but as you progress through the game, the Maken entity will jump from body to body of both enemy and ally, a process known as brain jacking.

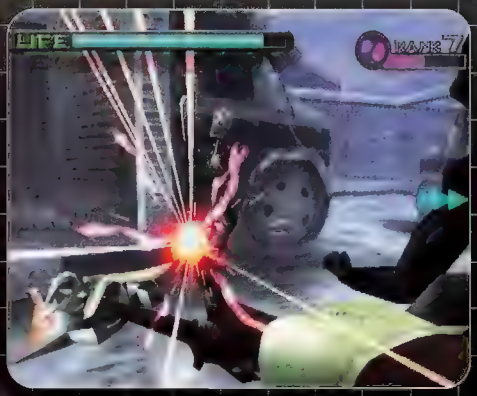
Not all the characters are created equal, and it is up to you to decide which persona you want to assume for the most efficient passage through the game: some levels can only be completed with a particular character, and retracing steps will reveal new areas. Jumping ability, speed, attack and defensive strength all vary according to the level of entity you brain jack, which peaks at eight. When an enemy is destroyed, it expels a sphere of energy that must be collected to enhance your rank, and before you can brain jack a more powerful character, its corresponding level must be matched.

While you are occasionally required to

employ platforming skills in Maken X—this added variety to the play mechanics is a big plus—the game is primarily driven by an endlessly grinding engine of first-person action. Because you're facing the opposition with a variety of bladed weapons and rarely use projectile attacks, the game doesn't feel like a typical first-person shooter, and the ability to assume the identity of new characters brings an added energy to the game. The enemies often come in close, attacking with aggressive lunges, requiring you to constantly shift into a guarded position by simply pressing back on the controller. Following the clever lead of the likes of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver, the combat works effortlessly from a lock-on feature that allows you to circle the opposition while constantly facing them. And while the hacking and slashing couldn't be any more basic, the threat of crippling monotony is bypassed by the ability to leap over your enemy, striking it from the back; prepare to use this maneuver a lot.

And prepare to be constantly engaged by the opposition. Throwing bombs, unloading rounds of artillery, blasting balls of fire, bizarre enemies pop up around every twist and turn: suicide dogs strapped to explosives; faceless Nazi soldiers who have chain guns fastened to their stomachs and machete-like blades running up both arms; S & M-inspired females who rest in coffin-like shells and protrude long spikes from their bodies when provoked. The game has an entirely unique, interesting look, a 1940s-inspired landscape mixed with anachronistic fantasy.

Other than voice acting that is disarmingly poor and plot development so inane and awkward that you wish time didn't have to be wasted trudging through any story at all, Maken X really doesn't do anything wrong. It's the kind of game that adheres to typical genre ideas, mixes in a few personal touches, and calls it a successful day. **GR**



- AWESOME CHARACTER DESIGNS
- PROPULSIVE MUSIC
- SOLID, STYLISTIC LOOK
- BRAIN JACK CONCEPT CREATES ILLUSION OF MORE VARIETY

REPUBLIC SAYS... ONE OF THE VERY FEW JAPANESE-DEVELOPED FIRST-PERSON ACTION GAMES, MAKEN X USES ATMOSPHERE AND INSPIRED DESIGN TO GREAT EFFECT.

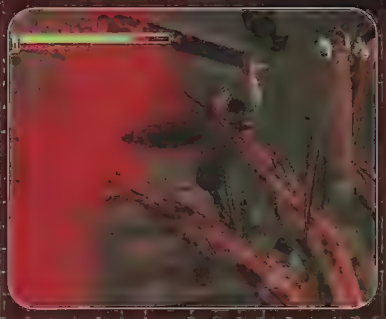
B+

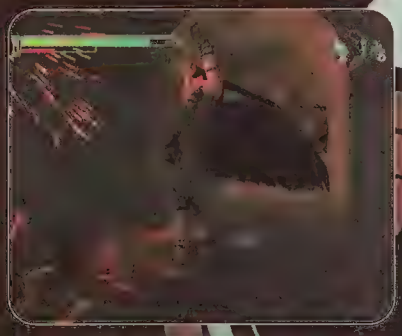
SWORD OF THE BERSERK
GUT'S RAGE

BY DAVE HALVERSON

The moment I laid eyes on the first blood-drenched screenshot out of Japan, I knew that it wasn't a question of whether Yuke's Berserk would come to the States, but rather, when and by whom. I mean, who could resist? It's based on a U.S.-bound anime, it's for Dreamcast, and it was just a quick sub or dub away from store shelves. Plus, Americans love blood and gore. Berserk is also a Dreamcast thoroughbred, designed for and taking full advantage of Sega's new hardware. I've been staring at ports for so long I began to forget what the Dreamcast is actually capable of. In localizing Berserk, Eidos has done a very good, bordering on great, job. Aside from some slight verbal miscues in the script (pretty young girls were likely not described as "hot" at the turn of the century) and turning Puck into a boy fairy from a girl, this is the best localization effort yet for the system, especially refreshing after the hack acting in Maken X and the butchering D2 is undergoing, even though it holds an M rating. Using many of the same players as Kain, Berserk's pivotal and numerous cinemas, which play an integral role in the overall experience, are a joy to behold. The game unfolds in cinematic fashion from the outset, dispensing as much story as action. Yukes has set a new standard in storytelling within a video game.

The story, which is actually compelling for a change, revolves around Gatsu, or Guts, the Black Swordsman. He wields the Dragonslayer—a massive sword—and is also armed with a manually operated firearm that shoots waves of razor-sharp daggers. Guts was found alive beneath his dead mother and lives in a world filled with inner demons (it's along story). Casca, his only love, was robbed of her sanity after witnessing the Eclipse massacre. She is his only reason for living, so he travels the land along with Puck (the sex-changed fairy!), driven to find a cure to restore her mind and the memories of their love. As the game opens, Guts and company stumble upon a band of street players, under siege from a band of scummy bandits. After slicing them to ribbons, Rita, a devilishly cute young player, invites Guts and company to join them in the village ahead. In true cine-





The Mandragora strain has infected his life and his love...
Tormented by demons, Guts must focus his rage

matic fashion, as they travel on to the village, the opening song and credits roll. This is when you begin to get a feeling of what lies in store: file it under magic moments. We soon meet Baron Balzac and learn of the strange disease that is turning villagers into grotesque monsters. From here the story blossoms in to what ends up being almost as good a movie as it is a game. Don't skip a second of it the first time you play.

The game itself is much, much deeper than you might think. There's a lot more to Berserk than just swinging your sword and bludgeoning infected villagers and the assorted assassins blocking your path. In a narrow passage, for instance, the Dragonslayer, being so long, isn't very useful. Thanks to some skillfully implemented collision detection, you'll have to resort to other means of enemy disposal. By holding the right shoulder button, Guts can throw knives, and putting his sword away, he can fire waves of daggers. These take several passes to kill many of the enemies, however, and they tend to swarm when you're most vulnerable. Thusly your position and tactics also factor into the fighting. Perched up high, it's often better to pick-off as many ground dwellers as possible. While heavily armored enemies are immune to Guts blades, it's always wise to clear out the weaklings and then deal with the them one on one. Guts can also perform

CONTINUED ON PAGE 122 ▸

- THE BEST TEXTURE QUALITY FOR THE DC YET
- THE COMPELLING STORY IS SKILLFULLY TOLD
- OFFERS MORE THAN THE USUAL HACK 'N SLASH
- RAISE A GLASS! THE SOUNDTRACK IS SUPERB!

REPUBLIC SAYS... BERSERK IS THE KIND OF GAME THE DREAMCAST NEEDS MORE OF. WELL PLANNED AND WELL EXECUTED IT'S EASILY YUKES BEST EFFORT TO DATE. DO NOT MISS IT.

A-

GUNDAM 0079

BY MIKE HOBBS

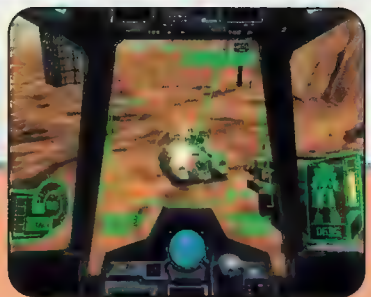
The long-running Gundam saga is ready to conquer the U.S. Does this first Dreamcast effort have what it takes?

Gundam games have had a spotty history to say the least. From strategy to one on one fighting, the decades-spanning anime series has seen its share of ups and downs, not that many Americans have been exposed to the various silicon Gundam attempts. The first domestic Gundam title, Side Story 0079, falls somewhere in the middle in terms of quality, serving up a very competent game of 3D mission-based mech combat, but staying far clear of any sort of broad, pick-up-and-play appeal.

As its name implies, this is a side story to the 0079 OVA, and it details a battle on a war-torn Australia. You and fellow members of the so-called White Dingo unit are sent out on what amounts to a number of search and destroy missions against classic Gundam foes. This is where the Gundam fan will find the most pleasure in the game—blowing up instantly recognizable icons. With a solid arsenal and fun devices such as a zooming sniper mode, players are encouraged to fight a smart fight, giving instruction to fellow GM units, attacking with patience, and using a very deliberate strategy. For this reason, action fans hoping for a fast-paced blast-fest worthy of an anime battle scene need not apply. Because the game attempts a modicum of realism you and your ally units lumber around with all the speed and grace one would expect of a towering mech.

Graphically, Gundam sits well within the limitations of the Dreamcast and is fairly bland overall, but still manages to impress here and there. Mechs look quite good, both in-game and during the numerous real-time cut scenes, and there's something innately satisfying about using your sniper zoom to spy on distant enemy mechs, slightly washed out from atmospheric hazing.

Without much flash and adrenaline pumping action, the appeal of this game is narrow, but not entirely inaccessible. If there were different mechs to choose from other than the standard rate GM and if the game's speed were a little bit exaggerated, then I could recommend Gundam to a wider audience. GR



- SOLID DESIGN AND EXECUTION
- COMPETENT, IF DULL GRAPHICS
- SLOW AS MOLASSES GAMEPLAY
- LACK OF MECH CHOICE

REPUBLIC SAYS... LUMBERING CONTROL AND A DECIDEDLY REALISTIC SLANT LIMITS THE APPEAL OF THIS DREAMCAST GUNDAM EFFORT, BUT HARDCORE FANS WILL GLEAN PLEASURE FROM IT.

C+

RUSH 2049

BY DAVE HALVERSON

If there's one thing that the Dreamcast is in short supply of, it's racing games. I mean, there's only what, a dozen or so? Seriously, the jury is back and the verdict is that racing games are the easiest and quickest to develop, and so we're going to be seeing a lot of them. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, especially if they all look as good as Rush 2049 does. Look on the bright side, it could be a puzzle game outbreak. Not being a big fan of arcades (I'm allergic to bullets), I must confess, I haven't played the coin-op version of 2049, but I have played all of the console variations of Rush and I can already guarantee you that this is the best of the series so far. In the first place, the cars don't look like pancakes, and while they don't handle anywhere close to normal, they react a whole lot better than the previous models. Two words: gradual arc. The elongated turning radius associated with Rush has always driven me crazy (God forbid any of these cars ever needs to make a u-turn), and while it's not completely fixed, the drifting in 2049 has been tuned generously so that it is possible to negotiate tight corners without beginning your turning arch 50 yards from the corner.

Visually, Rush 2049 is a shocker. The draw distance is way out there, the textures are rich and varied and the futuristic locales are skillfully designed. Fans of the set design in *Demolition Man* should feel right at home in Midway's futuristic cities, and the soundtrack, one of Midway's best, throbs in perfect cadence with the action. Also notable, the overall feeling of vastness you get is unparalleled on Dreamcast, and of course each track has a bevy of arteries to explore. Stunt and Obstacle modes have been added for those of you who couldn't get enough of Club Drive, and aside form the obvious fine tuning Midway has in front of them, that about wraps up my report. See you at the review. GR

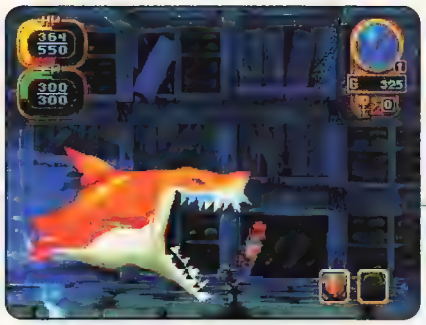
ALUNDRA 2

BY J. R. HAUGEN

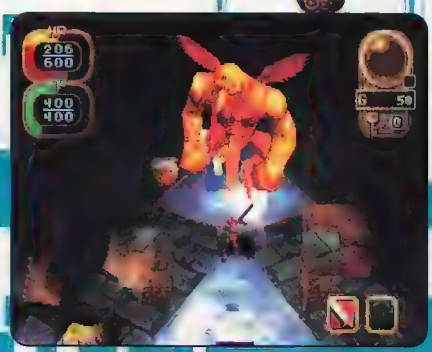
Put both your fingers and your brain to the test. Alundra 2 is a clinic in classic puzzle-solving

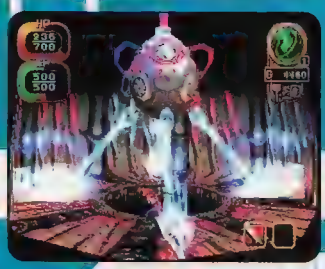
It's been a long time since I have played a game as engrossing as Alundra 2. On the surface, it looks like a meager adventure game with shoddy graphics, but underneath lies a level of enjoyment rivaling that of Zelda 64—at least on some levels. Alundra 2 made me want to play it whenever I wasn't playing it. When I was playing it, I didn't want to stop. Even when there was a puzzle that seemed utterly unsolvable, the game had me hooked.

The main reason Alundra 2 is so fun is the puzzles, ranging from large and complicated to deceptively simple. For example, there is one room you walk into containing only three green blocks in a row and a platform in the air that you need to reach. Shooting the outside blocks raises them up, but the middle block only moves horizontally when you shoot it. A puzzle like this, with only three simple elements to manipulate, can drive you crazy for hours trying to solve it. But when you do, there is immense satisfaction. Other puzzles are misleading in a different way. Some puzzles require precision timing to complete, like leaping off a platform in the split second you have before sharp spikes shoot out of it, then turning and jumping to the next platform to do the same. If you like games that put your brain as well as your fingers to the test, this is surely one for you.



Still on the topic of puzzles, many will be wondering if Alundra 2 is as hard as its beautifully hand-drawn predecessor. In the original Alundra, the puzzles were mind-numbingly difficult from start to finish, but in this sequel, that is not the case. The game definitely starts you out easy, and there is a gradual build of complexity. That is not to say, however, that there are puzzles you can't solve. There's not a single one in the game that you can't reason out if you just sit down and think about it. It helps if you've played games like this in the past, like Landstalker, because the mechanics involved are indeed familiar. Remember those beasties in Zelda who mirror your movements,





and whom you have to launch arrows at as you turn away to kill? There's a puzzle just like that in Alundra 2.

There's more to this game than just the puzzles, however. There are both 2D and 3D combat and boss encounters that can get quite frustrating. As in all classic boss encounters, you must figure out their weaknesses while avoiding attacks, then move in for the kill, so bosses are puzzles in themselves. Normal combat isn't as intensive, but creatures can beat the living crust out of you nonetheless. There is also the option to find secret puzzle pieces that unlock multi-hit combos, so in essence you level-up your character.

To keep the focus of the game on the puzzle-solving, there is little interaction with NPCs (which are all superbly voice acted in the cinema scenes), and a simple inventory system. You have a sword and shield, each of which can be leveled up only a few times. Throughout the game you find four magic rings that give you powers such as breathing underwater or walking on lava. The only other items are assorted healing articles. What's convenient is that all of your items can be assigned to the triangle button, and scrolled through with R2.

Also simple is the fluid camera, which you manipulate with the L1 and R1 buttons. There are eight degrees of turning that move seamlessly from one to the next, so you can have the camera circle perfectly around Flint, the main character, *Matrix*-style. Plus you can zoom in to three levels, so you'll always find a good camera angle to help you get through those dungeons.

In your quest to uncover the reason why people and animals are being turned into robotic monstrosities, you also uncover several mini-games. One has you throwing darts to earn yourself item power-ups. Another has you being chased by dogs while you try to make them jump on switches. There's even a game where you must control an RC car to collect items. In total, there are about ten mini-games, many of which need to be unlocked, so a little backtracking is necessary.

As mentioned, Alundra 2 is an average-looking game that masks great loads of fun. A surprisingly good story glues it all together and keeps you wanting more. Many complained about how hard the first one was; the sequel is the remedy. With a combination of all sorts of gameplay elements, Alundra 2 should keep you busy for a while, and you'll be loving it the whole time. But I wonder, how is this game at all related to the first Alundra? GR

Japanese games are being localized more often, and in a more timely manner—the byproduct of which has been a rash of bad dubs. Hack voice actors and typo-riddled translations are commonplace and often make quality cinemas comedic experiences. Activision obviously take their localization efforts very seriously, so we figured we'd speak to Alundra 2's producer, Mika Hayashi, to find out exactly how they do it.

GR: What is Activision's criteria for acquiring import games, and how do you go about the process?
Mika Hayashi: We throw darts at Famitsu magazine to choose a game to localize. [Laughs.] No, we put candidate games through an evaluation process and let our Acquisitions department do their thing. We have one of the smartest and most knowledgeable product acquisition teams in the business.

GR: Alundra 2 is written and acted very well, as was Knight & Baby. You obviously take your localization efforts very seriously. Can you give us a little background on the department?
Mika Hayashi: Activision's Japan studio handles the localization of Japanese games into English. The same localization team for Guardian's Crusade (Knight & Baby) was used for Alundra 2, consisting of executive producer Mika Hayashi and Associate Producer Tad Horie. We've localized a large number of console titles including Tenchu: Stealth Assassins, Blue Stinger, Pool Hustler, and the forthcoming Covert Ops: Nuclear Dawn.

GR: Many games get butchered these days in the localizing process. In fact, U.S.-developed games often feature dreadful acting. Do you feel game developers just don't place enough value on story elements to justify the expense?
Mika Hayashi: Bad acting can be the result of many things, such as bad direction, bad script, bad actors, etc. All of these can be fixed by paying attention to detail. Expense is a separate issue.

GR: How do you produce a script for a game?
Mika Hayashi: We take the preliminary English script and shed lots of blood, sweat, and tears. A good script takes months of preparation and focus.

GR: Is there an auditioning process for voice talent? How and from where do you choose your actors?
Mika Hayashi: Yes, there is an auditioning process. We choose our actors carefully to make sure the voices match the character in the game. For Alundra 2, we selected many of the same voice actors that were used in Metal Gear Solid.

GR: Do you have bilingual translators in house to make sure the attitude is suitable for each scene?
Mika Hayashi: Yes. They have been working with our production team for years.

GR: Do you try to match the Japanese voices or start from scratch?
Mika Hayashi: We try to match the Japanese voices. We would start from scratch only if the schedule permits it.

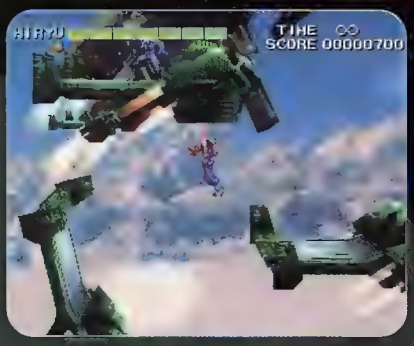
GR: The notion of leaving a game in its original Japanese form and adding English subtitles certainly appeals to the purist. Do you see this as a viable alternative to dubbing?
Mika Hayashi: No, it would annoy the casual consumer. Generally, subtitles tend to put off potential customers. It's strange but the same has always been true of the film industry as well.

GR: Do you ever watch dubbed anime to get ideas? If so, who do you feel does it best?
Mika Hayashi: No, I don't watch dubbed animes. That said, a number of people in our studio are fans of *Ghost in the Shell*, *Akira*, *Ninja Scroll*, *Demon City Shinjuku*, and *Vampire Hunter D*.

- Flint never talks, but is a brass nonetheless
- Voice acting is top-notch
- A sub-quest centering around finding toilets
- Graphics are fairly choppy and should be hand-drawn

GR Republic says... Alundra 2 is one of those games that keeps a system alive in its dying days. PlayStation owners still have something to look forward to.

B+



STRIDER 2

BY DAVE HALVERSON

Combining Capcom's exquisite hand-drawn sprites with detailed polygonal backgrounds, the old and the new collide. Strider's homecoming is finally at hand

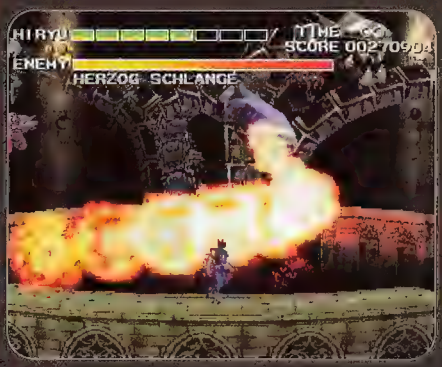
The first-ever 8-meg cart for the Genesis/Mega Drive out of Japan, Strider was one of the most highly anticipated games of the early '90s. And although it didn't mimic its arcade counterpart perfectly, it came close enough to become embedded in 16-bit lore forever. Although it was roughly a 30-minute game, the challenge became not just to beat it, which was by itself difficult, but to do so on one man. Back then, great games were few and far (very far) between, so you had to wring the enjoyment out of each one until it had nothing left to give. We relished every layer of parallax, and marvelled at the Z-80 as it pushed "realistic" voice and music out of our 16-bit boxes.

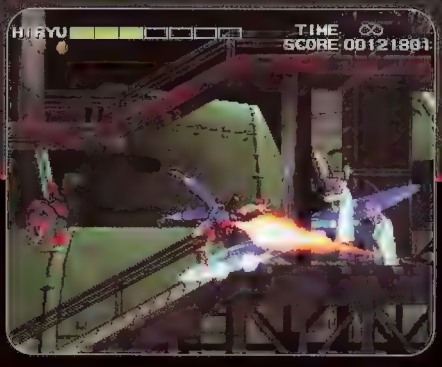
Fast forward to the year 2000, where there are so many good games around you can't possibly play them all, and the PS2 has just arrived. Can Strider 2 possibly strike that chord again? Can Capcom somehow recapture that old 16-bit magic with a short arcade-style game on dated hardware? Well...maybe. Strider 2, like its predecessor, is more than just a mere exercise in eye/hand coordination, it's a feeling—a rhythm you get into. It's a melding of music, sound, graphics, and gameplay all designed to evoke the feeling that you're an elusive, almost magical warrior—like James Bond meets Batman, but better. Capcom has certainly succeeded in driving this feeling home once again. The first thing they did right was bless this sequel with 2D gameplay, and the second was to emulate the old arcade game instead of trying to reinvent the wheel, taking all of its glorious moments and re-creating them on a larger scale. Not that the game is the same: Strider 2 is best described as a really great remix. Each level is now divided into six scenes, rather than existing as one long stretch, the last being a boss, and each loads separately (and thankfully quickly). There's also a new turbo option to give those fingers a rest (and hear what "Ha!" sounds like repeated really fast), and Strider has an intuitive new double-jump along with a homing super-shot when he's fully powered up.

Graphically, Capcom has mastered the technique of blending polygons and sprites, creating an amazing sense of separation and depth in

the process. The game has a lush, deep, cinematic air about it, and is colored and textured beautifully. The 2D art is especially magnificent, right down to the comic book-style cinemas that still grace the space between each world. As for the music, well, buy the soundtrack if you can.

If the game were tuned more like a straight action/platformer and less like an arcade game, it would be downright revolutionary. As it stands, though, Strider comprises 30 very short segments and has unlimited continues that drop you off exactly where you died. So in the area of gameplay, although it's intuitive, massively fun, and highly replayable, a case can be made that it's just a means to an end. The real goal is to score high grades by completing levels in record time with maximum efficiency, opening up hidden levels and other surprises. Which brings us back to my opening thoughts. Years ago when I had one game a month to dissect I would have embraced these characteristics, but as it stands my plate runneth over. The easy-to-beat hard-to-master moniker doesn't strike me the way it used to. I need to derive all of my pleasure from a game the first time through. This is either a product of my environment or a sign of the times. I played through once with Strider, once with the bonus character, Hien, whom you get for beating the game, and then a couple more times for the review, and I was done. Of course, I'll have at the bonus CD (an arcade-perfect port of the original with remixed music in tow) a few times and probably play them both once a month for many years. To this day I work out the Genesis version on my Nomad at least once a month. Strider is certainly a must-have title, but it's still an arcade game, so don't expect the next Castlevania or Ghouls 'n Ghosts, just revel in its intuitive flow and old-school soul instead. **GR**





- SUPERB 2D ART IS SECOND TO NONE
- DEEP DETAILED BACKGROUNDS
- CINEMATIC CAMERA ANGLES A NICE TOUCH
- THE NEW SOUNDTRACK LIVES UP TO THE NAME

REPUBLIC SAYS... While it may be over too quick, it's still 100% Strider, and that's enough for me to highly recommend it. Capcom has created yet another arcade-style masterpiece.

B+

GALERIANS

BY TOM STRATTON

He's just a kid who wants to find his sister and regain his memory. Being bi-polar and full of psychic rage hasn't helped

Obviously spawned by the new genre of still-camera, enigmatic story-driven games that have slowly become a staple on the aging PlayStation, Galerians offers a new slant on the "survival" experience. As Rion, you will search through this mysterious world in which computers run everything. Involved in multiple run-ins with new, artificially created super-species whose prime directive is the total annihilation of their inferior human creators known as Galerians, Rion struggles to find the key to unlocking his memory of being a kid in a loving family.

Galerians uses an inventive game model that is built around the use of various psychic attacks, making it the first psychic survival adventure game. The psychic attacks in the game include telekinesis (the ability to levitate and freeze matter), pyrokinesis (the ability to mentally incinerate matter), and psychokinesis (the ability to deliver powerful psychic blasts). Able to take certain pills, called Psychic Power Enhancement Chemicals, or PPECs, Rion has the power to rage psychic combat on the Galerians throughout the game.

His ability isn't always used aggressively, though. Many puzzles can be solved by walking up to a locked door or suspicious-looking object and engaging an ESP-type ability. This results in a mental vision, basically serving as a hint to where Rion will need to go in order to access the unobtainable area or item. Crave claims that the game holds 50-plus hours of gameplay, but I was able to complete it in less than 10. This isn't said to showboat or disprove their claim; it's just a testament to the efficiency of the ESP ability.

Granted, many of the puzzles are lightweight and don't involve much brain work, but the game does an impressive job of keeping the story moving and you glued to the controller. On a more grim, but riveting, note, Galerians holds one of the highest body counts I have come to remember. Maybe I have become sensitive to Rion and his situation. He is a good kid, doesn't

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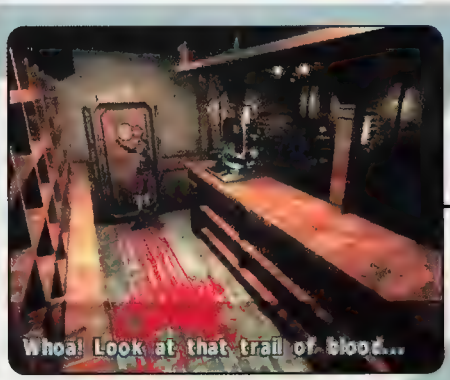


- COMPELLING AND TWISTED STORY
- PLAYER IS FORCED TO TAKE MANY EXPERIMENTAL DRUGS
- GRAPHICS ARE ROUGHTG. NOTHING PROGRESSIVE
- LOADING SCREEN TAKES AWAY FROM THE ATMOSPHERE

REPUBLIC SAYS... AN EASY GAME TO PICK UP AND PLAY. GALERIANS FLAUNTS A UNIQUE ELEMENT OF TELEKINESIS AND ESP TO CREATE A NEW STYLE OF PLAY MECHANICS.

B

MEDIEVIL 2

BY BRADY FIECHTER

If the inimitable director Tim Burton were to ever dabble in video game design, the result would undoubtedly resemble Medievil 2. The talents responsible for the creation of this winning sequel were obviously inspired by Burton's strange gothic visions, and they've created a world that is delightful and inventive, full of mysterious fantasy and visual wonder.

The time period is late-19th-century, the setting the dusky streets, villages, and castles of London. Terrorizing the population of humans, who owe their skeletal designs to *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas,* are all sorts of bizarre and delightful creations: pumpkin creatures spread a transforming disease on villagers; little ogre-people live in the shadows of the sewers; circus Fat Ladies waddle maniacally as they drop sonic booms over the landscape.

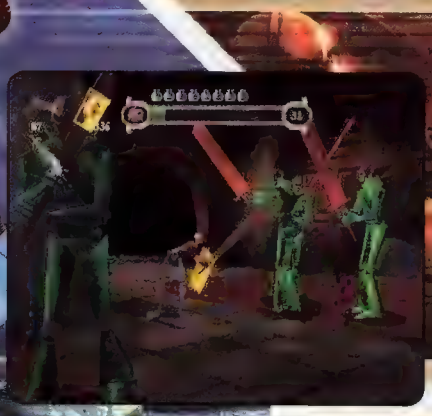
As fate would have it, the bony and rather pathetic skeleton named Sir Daniel Fortesque is resurrected from the dead once again to do battle with these gangs of terrors, commanded by the diabolical Lord Palethorn. Driven by a desire to enslave the land, Lord Palethorn is searching for the pages to the Zarok spell book, a tome of the occult containing unimaginable powers.

In his search for Lord Palethorn, Sir Dan is aided by professor Kift, whose laboratory holds many secrets and serves as an assembly station for weapons and power-ups, which include enhanced swords, flaming crossbows, bombs and pistols. To retrieve these and other special items, Sir Dan must defeat most of the enemies in a level, so that their souls can be released to fill a magical chalice which is used for barter.

While there is more than enough engaging hacking, slashing and shooting in Medievil 2, the action can become a bit cloddish at times, hampered by a difficult 3D perspective. There is never a feeling of flowing, effortless wielding of Sir Dan's sword, and there will be moments in the game when you yearn for more commanding control over your attacks.

The game is at its best when you are required to dispose of your enemy by less aggressive means: I loved the level where vampires had to be lead into direct sunlight, and the level where charging police had to be avoided while searching for a pass into a nightclub. And also entertaining are the moments when Sir Dan is forced to twist off his head, placing it on a severed hand that can scurry through small spaces.

The beauty of Medievil 2 is that it mixes puzzle solving, platforming, intense action and big adventure, all to great effect, never relying on one element of game design to carry the weight. It may not be an enormous achievement like the original—the boxing match midgame with a mechanical beast was ill-conceived, and the presence of alien creatures sabotages the wonderful ambience—but Medievil 2 survives any shortcomings to emerge a smashing success. GR



- GREAT ENGINE AND IMAGINATIVE DESIGN
- EXCELLENT BALANCE OF PLAY MECHANICS
- MAGNIFICENT MUSIC FITS PERFECTLY
- TWITCHY CONTROL AND PROBLEMATIC CAMERA

REPUBLIC SAYS... WHILE IT DOESN'T LIVE UP TO THE ORIGINAL, THIS IS TERRIFIC ENTERTAINMENT. PLAYSTATION 2, PLEASE.

B+

SPEED PUNKS

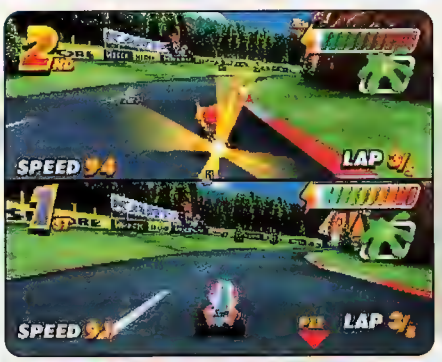
BY BRADY FIECHTER

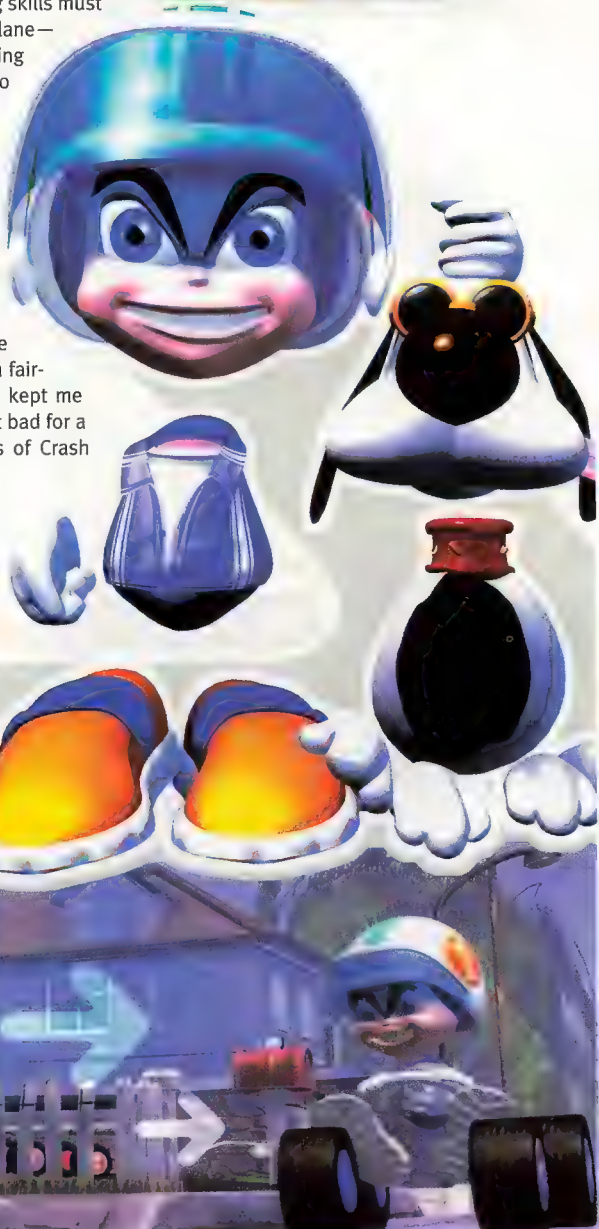
Let's get this out of the way: Speed Punks is no Mario Kart 64 or Crash Team Racing. It doesn't have an inventive turbo system, the incomparable magic of a Nintendo universe, the invaluable appeal of iconic characters and familiar visual style. So what. It's a blast to play.

Speed Punks can't claim the classic label stamped on Nintendo and Naughty Dog's kart racing gems, but it does succeed admirably on a number of accounts, from the endearing racers to the solid track design to the bright, wonderfully appealing visuals.

As the game opens with an entertaining CG sequence set to music by pop singer Jamiroquai, you are introduced to your colorful gang of racers, a motley crew of punk kids who hang out in a huge tree house. Before opening a few new characters by placing first on all four tracks in the three separate racing circuits, you'll start out with a selection of six limbless racers, who offer slight variations in speed, acceleration and weight. Apparently, these little tykes (and one dog) have far too much pent-up energy, so their only source of conflict is the need to release some aggression on the racetrack. This leads to a simple setup of a typical five-lap race for the finish with the aid of an array of power-ups and kart-disabling devices like bombs and projectiles. While the deployment of weapons is, of course, crucial for victory, deft racing skills must also be called upon to reach victory lane—finding the perfect racing line, dealing with oversteer challenge, moving into position to collect turbo charges.

What really impressed me about Speed Punks was its dazzling racing universe, brimming with detailed touches like moonlit glows, giant waterfalls and huge, active objects like rollercoasters and ferris wheels. And then there's the highly addictive brand of kart racing, which, despite some obnoxiously cheap opponents and a fairly basic level of gameplay strategy, kept me coming back for hours at a time. Not bad for a game that competes with the likes of Crash and Mario. **GR**





- I'M ALWAYS GAMG FOR A NEW KART RACER
- VIVID. COLORFUL RACING UNIVERSE
- GOOD BALANCE BETWEEN RACING AND COMBAT
- THE COMPUTER LOVES TO CHEAT ON THOSE LAST LEVELS

REPUBLICSAYS... AFTER PLAYING CRASH TEAM RACING, ANY PS KART RACER THAT CAN GRAB MY ATTENTION IS DOING SOMETHING RIGHT.

B

JEREMY MCGRATH SUPERCROSS 2000

BY DAVE HALVERSON

Slap in a Ram Pak and reach for the earplugs.

Acclaim serves up a nice-looking, albeit simplistic, N64 racer

Not so long ago games depicting the great sport of motocross were sparse to say the least. Sure, you could hit the arcade and play Stadium Cross until the money ran out (which didn't take long) or brave the polygonal experiment that was Acclaim's Dirt Trax FX, but otherwise, until the birth of the PlayStation and N64 (I'm not counting Super Motocross on the 32X for good reason) the genre remained untapped. Just a few short years later there are now plenty of motocross games to choose from, and while some—namely 989's Supercross Circuit and EA's Supercross 2000—come close to delivering all of the spills, chills and thrills of the real thing, no one has gotten it all the way right...yet.

One would think that a game branded with the name Jeremy McGrath, the Michael Jordan of motocross, would deliver on all counts. But while Acclaim's latest does deliver some pretty graphics and easy control, it fails miserably in the area of physics and features some seriously questionable collision detection.

When it comes to graphics, McGrath 2000 really delivers the goods. Unfortunately, the frame rate seems to be the tradeoff for the nice visuals, as things seldom rise above 20 or so frames per second. The courses all have great depth and detail and the bikes and riders look solid and animate in a very realistic manner, especially around corners. Flying off the big jumps, extreme tricks are almost too easy to execute; however, if you don't select one, the jumping animation otherwise is quite nonexistent. You should be able to apply some style without whipping out a full- on freestyle trick seldom seen during a real race.

When it comes to the game's control, Acclaim has obviously taken the shortest road. McGrath 2000 is 100 percent a

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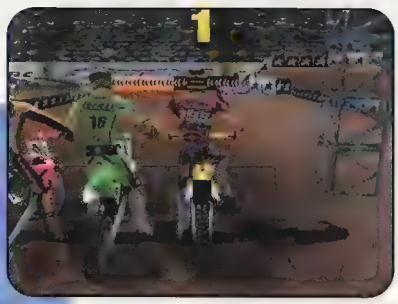


The easy-to-use track editor is one of McGrath 2000's strongest features.

- REALISTIC GRAPHICS DELIVER THE LOOK
- ACTUAL VENUES PROVIDE THE REALISM
- THE FRAME RATE GOES CHUG
- THE MUSIC BITES HARD

REPUBLIC SAYS... A HUGE IMPROVEMENT OVER THE LAST MCGRATH BUT STILL NO CIGAR. PERHAPS THE DREAMCAST VERSION WILL TIP THE SCALES.

C+

SYPHON FILTER 2

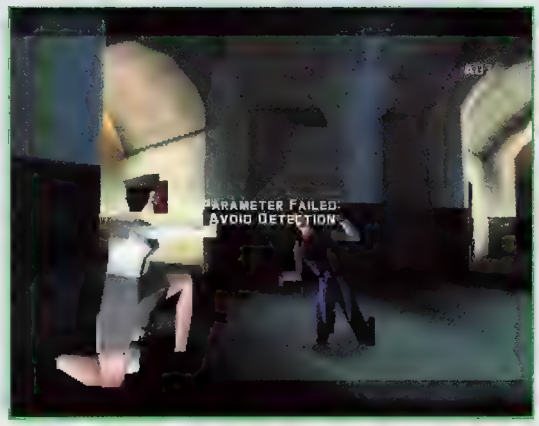
PlayStation A-

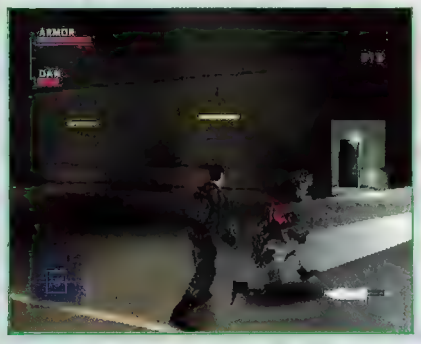
• reviewed by pooch • developer: eidetic • publisher: 989 studios • available: now

As I mentioned last month in an in-depth preview of Syphon Filter 2, it's a pleasure to receive that uncommon title which takes all elements of a game—story, graphics, control, weapons, audio (both sound effects and music), gameplay (puzzles, mazes, shooting, etc.), difficulty, uniqueness—and combines them together in a tight, well-balanced package. Few companies know how to do this successfully. As was the case with SF1, SF2 is a testament that Eidetic is one of them.

In order to give players the highest quality sequel possible, the game weighs in as a two-disc set. The main reasons for the additional disc are because the levels are larger and the cinemas are greatly expanded. There are more cinemas, both during the level—to advance the story or add an objective—and between each level. Besides being longer and of better quality than the originals, they lend an even higher level of intrigue to the covert ops taking place. A couple favorite aspects of the game are the lock-on targeting mechanism—one of the best in the business—the night vision goggles (especially on the train level), and the great, mood-setting soundtrack.

SF2 is not only a must-buy for players of the first title, but for anyone who owns a PS and is waiting for the next big thing in the PS universe. In the action genre, it doesn't really get much better than this. **GR**



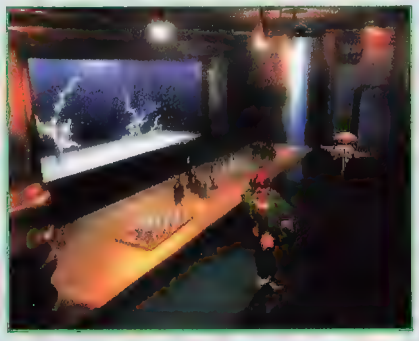


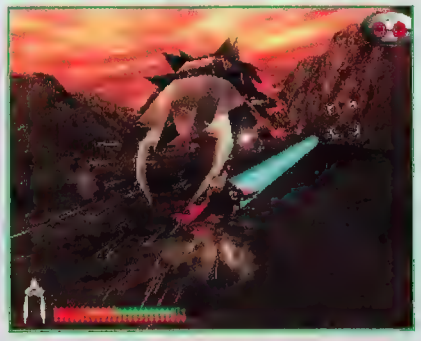
VANARK

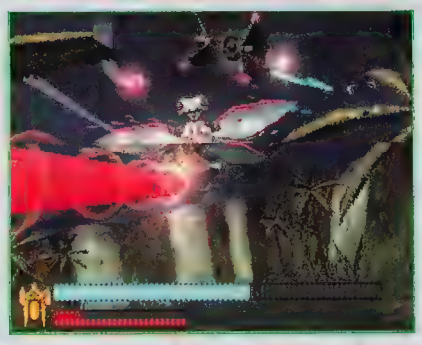
PlayStation B

• reviewed by d halverson • developer: asmik • publisher: jaleco • available: now

Jaleco gets double props on this one, first for bringing out another shooter for the PlayStation (because it's been way too long) and second, for making it a good one. I feel an obscure reference coming on...Verytex! Verytex is an old Asmik 8-meg Mega-Drive shooter. I mention it because it had the same flare for the genre that Vanark possesses and it got it the same way—by cherry picking the best the genre has to offer. Vanark shows signs of Panzer Dragoon, Darius, StarFox, and Galaxy Force. The poly work on the water, lava and other fluid surfaces is especially impressive and the game's assortment of air- and ground-based enemies are an inspired bunch that cover the gamut from mecha to amphibian and everything in between. The pseudo-Wing Commander between-level segues allow you to interact with the flight team and other inhabitants of your mother ship between ops, adding a level of intimacy to the proceedings, although I found myself aching to back into the frey. Still, a cool shooter all the way. **GR**







EAGLE ONE

PlayStation B-

• reviewed by m hobbs • dev: glass ghost • pub: infogrames • avail: apr

The mission-based combat flight genre has been pretty well served by Namco's Ace Combat series, but UK developers Glass Ghost look to change the balance a bit with Eagle One. Mostly successful, this thoughtful effort would have benefited from a higher level of technology, but it still manages its fair share of challenging action.

Surrounded by mock-newscast FMV, the game's missions run the usual gamut of destroy, retrieve, and protect-style objectives, but include nice touches like vehicle changes, in-flight refueling, and re-arming sequences. The real draw of the game, however, is the use of a USMC Harrier jump jet for a good number of the missions. Perhaps familiar to readers from James Cameron's *True Lies*, the Harrier is a VTOL, meaning it can hover and take off vertically like a helicopter, and Glass Ghost has made the most of this mechanic. Switching off between hover and jet mode does take some getting used to, but once maneuvering becomes second nature, the game takes on almost a Warhawk vibe, something we've been missing since the U.S. PS launch.

Not that it's necessarily easy to come to grips with the control in this game, however. There's a definite lack of refinement to the game's feel, almost as if there isn't enough processing power to go around. This is reflected in the engine as well, which also looks and feels rough around the edges, with heavy fogging. Thankfully, interesting details abound, like a heat distortion effect caused by your jet's engines, and an action replay mode, which allows you to review around ten seconds of in-game footage from multiple angles, even from within a mission currently underway.

Eagle One is different enough from Ace Combat to warrant a look for fellow flight combat fans, just don't expect a similar level of refinement or polish. GR

MR. DRILLER

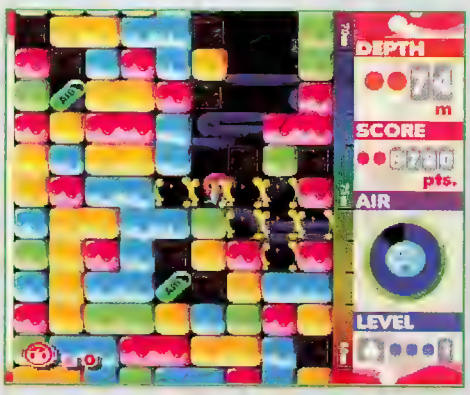
PlayStation B-

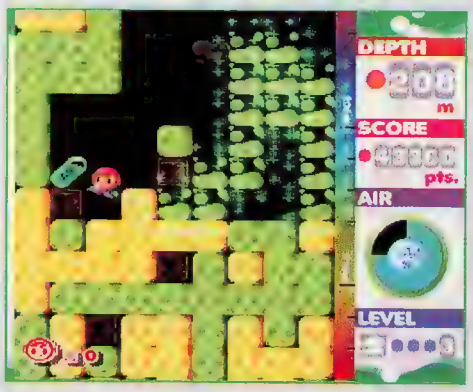
• reviewed by m hobbs • developer/publisher: namco • available: summer

Take Dig Dug, wrap it in a colorful, minimalist, modern aesthetic and add a color-matching, falling-block play element and you have a crude description of Namco's Mr. Driller. This one-player puzzle game has you racing to the bottom of a field of colored blocks in an effort to rescue a crowd of cute little blue fellows.

As Mr. Driller, your skill is drilling, funny enough, and as you tunnel downwards or sideways, any solid mass of blocks with matching color disappears. This causes other blocks and sections from above to fall, and if they land on like-colored areas, these will then disappear, possibly in a great and satisfying chain reaction. And depending upon the play mode, various items will be placed strategically throughout the field. In the Time Attack mode, little clocks are scattered about, shaving seconds off your time—crucial to completing the level under the limit. In arcade and survival mode, caches of air become the booty, as Mr. Driller is limited in his level of oxygen.

The mind game in Mr. Driller is suitably manic, and actually quite difficult, as you simultaneously must charge for the bottom, avoid falling blocks (which can squash you), snatch valuable time or air, and keep your eyes peeled for potentially helpful chain reactions. In concert, these elements create a high addiction factor, with a pace to match that of any other puzzler.





Mr. Driller's biggest single demerit is the lack of a two-player mode, and in a game like this, it's a curious omission indeed. That aside, here's a great low-budget effort from Namco that should find a happy home in any puzzle fan's collection. GR

MAGICAL RACING TOUR

• reviewed by b fiechter • dev: crystal dynamics • pub: eidos • avail: now

PlayStation D+

If you've ever played a kart racing game, you know how exasperating it can be when you've run a perfect race, only to be derailed at the finish line by a completely unexpected weapon blast, or a last millisecond magical boost of victory-stealing speed from a second-place competitor whose vehicle isn't supposed to be as fast as yours. And if you like kart racing games for the same reasons I do, you also know that this artificial difficulty becomes the thrilling frustration that keeps the game at a constant pitch of intensity.

Walt Disney World Quest Magical Racing Tour knows this concept, but hasn't a clue how to keep it contained within an entertaining balance of racing and combat, and the game ends up drowning in a cauldron of design flaws. Why continually give the second-place kart the most powerful weapon in the game? Why implement a powerslide system so poorly conceived that you end up losing time trying to use it? Why make the cars grip so tightly that racing technique is out of the question? And is that grass or water I'm racing over?

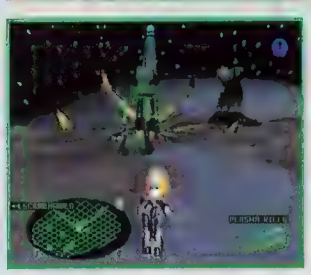
Magical Racing Tour's target audience is obviously children. It tries to use its Disney universe to create a blithe and endearing atmosphere, but even the most gullible child will bristle at the limited selection of dime-store characters and slipshod, barely recognizable themed levels like Pirates of the Caribbean. And like me, they'll run screaming from the room in horror when they are confronted with a gospel version of "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah." GR

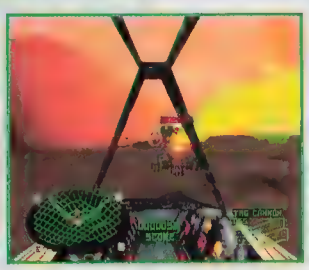
BATTLEZONE: ROTBD

• review by j.r. haugen • dev: climax • pub: crave/activision • avail: april

Nintendo 64 C+

The year is 1962, you're on the moon, the Russians are on the moon, and you're fighting each other on the moon in hovertanks. Battlezone: Rise of the Black Dogs isn't that bad of a game as far as gameplay is concerned, because it is fun sliding around and shooting things in low gravity, and the game is also fairly challenging in the strategy mode, where you must issue orders and insure they're completed. The problem lies in the meager graphics and sound, which is something that in this day and age really hinders the experience. In the end, Battlezone doesn't stand out in any notable way, good or bad. GR



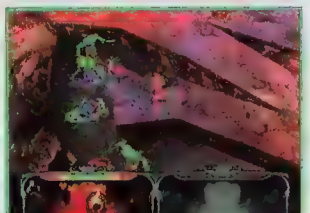


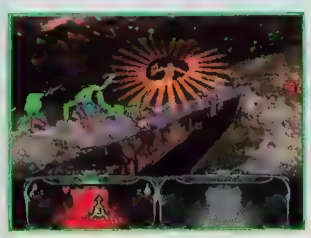
GAUNTLET LEGENDS

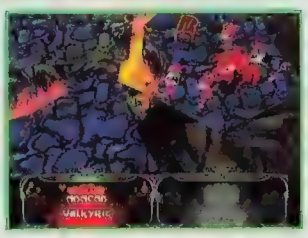
• reviewed by c hoffman • developer/publisher: midway • available: now

PlayStation C+

Midway came remarkably close to bringing the arcade experience of Gauntlet Legends home to PlayStation users, but one major hang-up got in the way: no four-player mode. How they can release a Gauntlet game in this day that only accommodates two players is beyond me, but if you can overlook that, then the latest from Midway is a more than competent conversion of the coin-op. Like the N64 version, this game has added adventure elements (obelisks to find, etc.) that make the game much meatier than the arcade original. Visuals are surprisingly good; characters rarely get lost in the melee, and all the animations are included, right down to the magic effects and the heroes stomping on venomous scorpions with their heavy boots. The game also moves at a decent clip, though the heroes don't attack quite as rapidly as they did in the arcade, nor do enemies generate as quickly. Speaking of which, why do the enemy generators reappear shortly after they've been destroyed? It's a strange anomaly that adds mild frustration to an already challenging game. On the other hand, an improved auto-aiming feature is very convenient. If only Gauntlet Legends had included a four-player option, it would have been a great conversion, but with only two, it's merely above average. GR







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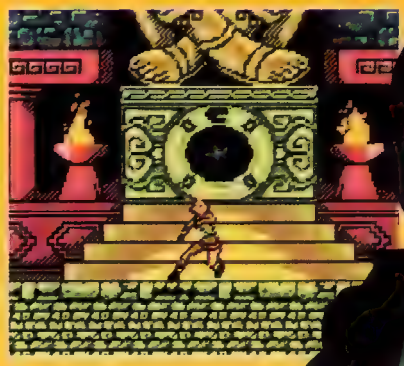
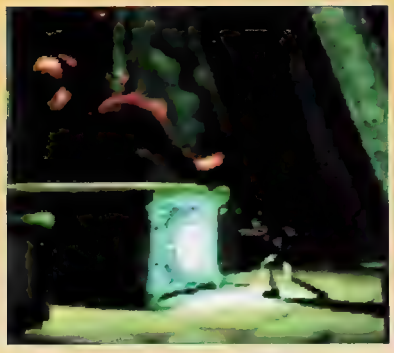
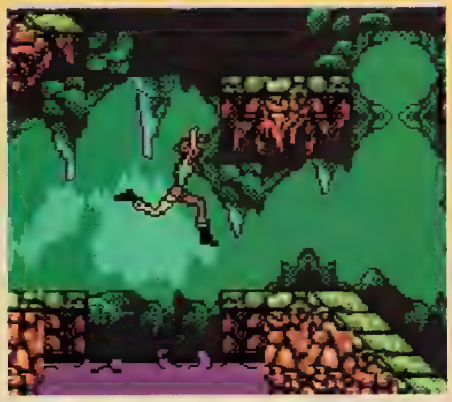
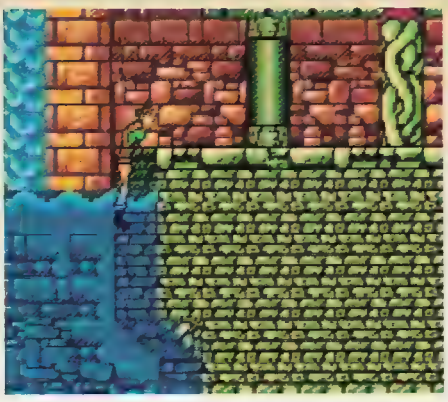
tomb raider dev: core • pub: eidos • avail: april previewed by d halverson Fire up the Worm Light and bust out the battery pack because without a doubt, Tomb Raider is the best action game ever crammed into a cartridge for the GameBoy. It sets a standard that in all probability will not be surpassed before the GameBoy Advance makes its debut; you're looking at the must-have game for your GameBoy Color. What makes this Prince of Persia-meets-D-cups so desirable (besides Lara's jiggly frame) are great gameplay and the fact that you never feel like you're playing a little version of a big game. Tomb Raider feels like a game you'd play on your regular TV—somehow transcending the tiny display. Whether it's the richly detailed and colored environments, the gorgeous animation or the handsome cinema screens, it's quite a feat given the obvious restraints and challenges Core faced squeezing their breasty heroine into a 3.5-inch space.

Making the transition to the small screen even easier to swallow, Tomb Raider's as big on story as its big sisters. Using still frames, the tale—about a homicidal king and the bloodthirsty god he murdered his own people to feed—comes across extremely well. 1000 years later, Lara's after their sealed remains. Harnessed within a crystal, sealed in an Obelisk, hidden within a huge Mayan temple deep in the Amazon rainforest...this is obviously a job for a titular tomb raider. Given that the GameBoy has but two buttons, the gameplay is remarkably religious to the series. Lara draws her weapon via the select button and performs all of her trademark moves using a series of button presses together with the directionals. Jumping with the D-pad is somewhat laborious, but it works well enough within the confines of the game, which is methodical in nature. Each gaping chasm is riddled with pitfalls and hidden switches, enemies and obstacles. Just like the original, there are serious ledges to overcome, perilous jumps to clear, and surprise segues linking the action to the drama. Because our preview version wouldn't save, there's no telling how long Tomb Raider is (we had to send Lara back home to Eidos after our initial analysis), so stay tuned for the impending review. GR







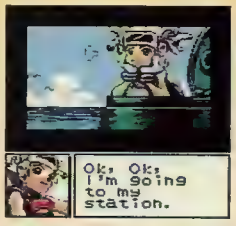


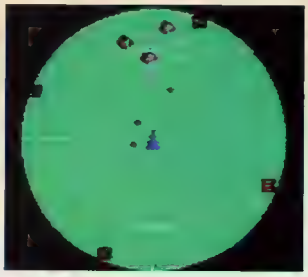
looney tunes collector: alert! dev/pub: infogrames • avail: summer **previewed by e fear** Receiving a game based on a licensed property is like going into a greasy spoon diner when traveling: I expect to end up with a bad taste in my mouth, but there are always the occasional pleasant surprises. This is an example of one of those occasions.

LTC:A! is an odd mix of adventure, role-playing, and platforming, with the thinnest slice of Pokémon-style collecting thrown into the mix. The premise: Marvin the Martian and K9 have plans to destroy the Earth, but K9 accidentally dropped the teleporter from their spaceship, and it's broken into 10 pieces that are now scattered around the world (broken up into a distinctly Zelda-like map, replete with underground and water areas). You start out as Bugs Bunny, and as you travel through the land, you meet up with many other Looney Tunes characters (20 friends and 22 secret characters), most of whom you must battle in order to convince them to join your cause in saving the world. Once you beat them, they give you a special item or ability or become a playable character you can switch to, with differing abilities and strengths that you need to draw on to complete certain tasks. There are many tasks to complete, as well as Instant Martians to defeat and collect (25 give you an additional two units of health).

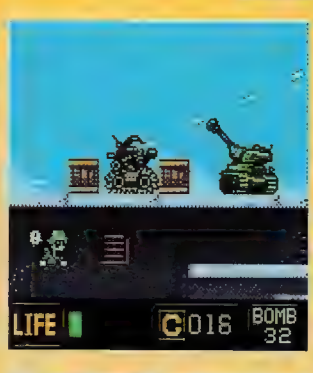
The idea is basic, the story is simple, and, most importantly, the game is fun, even at this early stage. It's no filet mignon, mind you; but it's much tastier than what we initially expected. Try a bite: you'll like it. **GR**

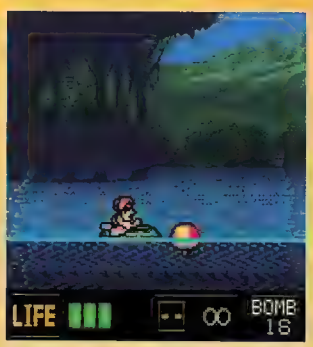
dive alert: becky dev: sacnoth • pub: snk • avail: now **previewed by e fear** Another verbose RPG-ish game, this is like Biomotor Unitron, except you control a sub instead of a robot, the battles are slow-motion radar fights instead of Pokémon-style battles, and the goal is to reach your ocean planet's single land mass, Terra, and be reunited with the few remaining humans still alive. There's a lot of text to read in the beginning, but it clarifies the game, creates the story, and really draws you in. We just got our copy right before deadline, so I've just begun this game, but I'm sucked in already. The game's slow pace takes patience, but it'll be worth it. **GR**



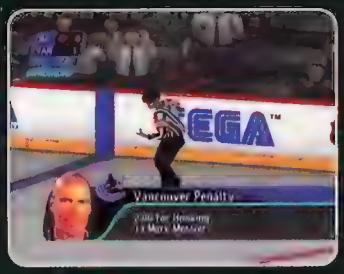


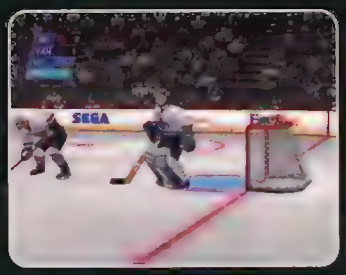
metal slug 2nd mission dev/pub: snk • avail: april **reviewed by c hoffman** If you've played the first Metal Slug, then you probably don't need to read any more of this review. Just know it has more of everything and go buy the darn thing as soon as possible. Metal Slug 2nd Mission sticks to the same formula as the previous game, featuring side-scrolling blast-'em-up action both on foot and in a variety of vehicles like a fighter jet, the Slug Sub submarine, a jetpack or the Metal Slug tank itself. But SNK didn't just recycle the same game that Neo Geo fans have already been playing for months. They've added multiple paths through the game (a total of 38 levels), multiple characters, and 100 P.O.W.s to rescue, each one offering tips and advice. Throw in stunning graphics, great audio, and some of the best animation ever seen in a handheld game and you have a must-own for action fans. **A- GR**





With two instantly classic, highly acclaimed sports titles under Sega Sports' belt in NFL2K and NBA2K, there were lofty expectations set for the release of NHL2K. It's interesting to note that the first two titles were both developed by Visual Concepts, but for the latter game, Sega Sports went with Black Box. And, although the developer delivers an option-filled, highly enjoyable title with amazing player renders, the game just falls below the bar set by the first two games.





NHL2K probably won't become a classic—which is hard to state, given the hope I had for this product, but it's unavoidably true. It delivers a lot of no-frills fun, spurts of tension, mild frustration and warranted return visits—all makings for a classic, yet something important is still missing. Each time I play and finish a contest, whether it's spanking the CPU or taking out a human friend who is foolish enough to step onto the ice with me, I am unable to recall genuine moments of the game. Goals can feel satisfying, as does a nicely placed check; it's just that both of these experiences happen so often that they lose their impact.

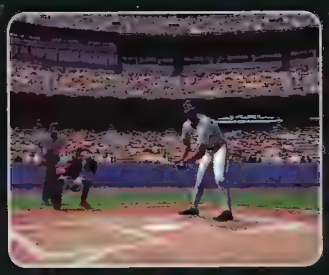
The action is accurate, the motion-captured animations are great, yet the crucial element that ties the two together, AI, is faulty, almost scripted to react depending on goal differential. NHL2K is a good game regardless of the high, almost ridiculous standard Sega Sports has already branded. **GR**

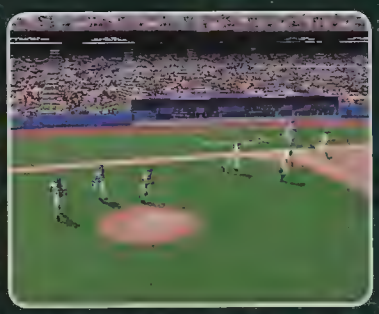
gamers republic sports

NHL 2K

developer: black box publisher: sega available: now

B





EA Sports is set to release its latest game in the rich tradition of its baseball lineage, Triple Play 2001. And, as was the case with the previous incarnations, TP2001 has the full Major League Baseball and MLBPA licenses.

In addition to the modern players, for the first time in the Triple Play series, TP2001 brings some of the legends of the game to life with the exclusive 500 Home Run Club mode. This allows gamers to grab a bat and step up to the plate as some of the best sluggers of all time, like Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, Ted Williams, Mickey Mantle, and other legends. This mode includes 16 MLB greats and an Extreme Target mode, where players can hit targets and build up points for added excitement and competition in the home-run hitting contest.

Adding to the realism of America's favorite pastime, signature batting and pitching styles of players such as Mark McGwire, Nomar Garciaparra, Randy Johnson, Kevin Brown, Babe Ruth, and Reggie Jackson have been emulated for use in the game. There are also new scripted animations for situations like umpire arguments, high-fives, and end-game celebrations.

The most common complaint that people have with baseball video games is that the fielding aspect of the game is uninspiring. To liven things up, EA Sports has implemented a cool new fielder's point-of-view that adds a completely new challenge to the game.

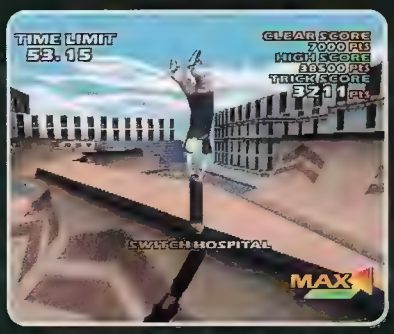
Triple Play 2001 once again is among the best in the genre on the PlayStation, if not on all consoles. The team at EA Sports continues to add new gameplay and excitement to the already excellent series. **GR**

gamers' republic sports

TRIPLE PLAY 2001

developer/publisher: electronic arts available: april

B+



With Street Sk8er 2, Electronic Arts and Micro Cabin are looking to build upon the success of the original by adding to the game's depth and increasing its visual appeal. First off, the graphics engine is improved greatly. Where the first game was grainy first-generation quality, this new game boasts huge environments, smooth animation, and is running in hi-res mode.

The gameplay of the first Street Sk8er was simplistic, and once you initiated a move, you were committed and unable to abort it. This second game is along those same lines, with simple moves, but now you must mix up your moves to score big and ultimately progress. Skaters are ranked by points, and their skills improve as you progress. Again, like last year's game, Street Sk8er 2 features an ability editor, in which after each level, you delegate earned points to different characteristics, such as strength, speed, etc. The big addition this year is a design-a-park system, where you build the ramps and slopes for competition. The park is confined to a small warehouse, so although the editor is new, it is fairly limited.

Overall, the experience is different enough to stand on its own, although it is more fantasy driven. Skate locations also seem forced and unrealistic in terms of hunting down prime skate spots to create a line. Instead, blatant ramps and rails scream "Look, I'm here for you to do tricks on!" GR

gamers' republic sports

STREET SK8R 2

developer: micro cabin publisher: electronic arts available: april

C+

I liken Rock the Rink to Road Rash Hockey, a sports games for people who don't know sports—anti-jocks, yuppie wannabes, and college degenerates. In other words, it appeals to the largest possible U.S. demographic! So let's dive in and beat some heads, shall we. First pick your team. The Demons look healthy, but what about the Cabbies; I bet nobody f***s with them. Hey wait, are those Gangsters? Save it to say all of these teams consist of twisted freaks with locales to match. And if you don't find anything that makes you happy, create your own band of misfits. Once on the ice, if the damn ref will ever part with the puck, get ready for some no-holds barred hockey action. Checking? High Sticking? Tripping? All legal.

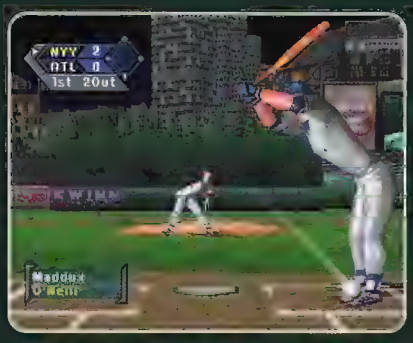
Although RtR is total fiction, the models are impressive, the animation is on par with EA's sims, and there's the usual selection of modes, including arcade and league play. Of course, as with all of EA's twister games, you also get your fair share of speedy rock ballads and a really annoying announcer that will stick in your head for approximately three days. On par with EA's best parodies like Mutant League Football, Road Rash, and now NASCAR Rumble, RtR does for hockey what those games did for their respective pastimes—turns them inside out! Have fun! GR

gamers' republic sports

ROCK THE RINK

developer/publisher: electronic arts available: april

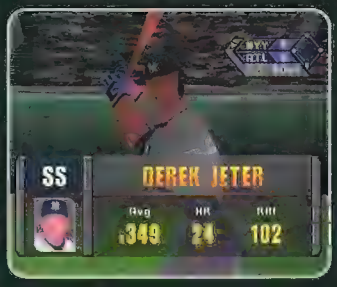
C+

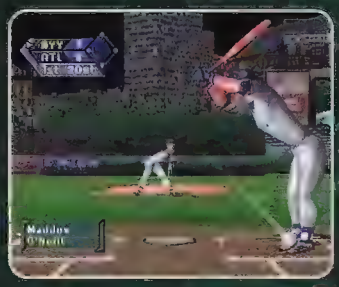


After a disappointing first outing on the PlayStation, Team .366 and 3Do have recuperated in the offseason and delivered a great PlayStation edition of their authentic baseball game. The rumors were that High Heat 2000 for the PS was a rushed port of the PC game by team members not entirely familiar with the system. But this year, 3DO has put their staff through rigorous PS spring training, and the effort may actually live up to Trip's expectations.

In addition to the exclusive license of Sammy Sosa (who will still appear visually in other baseball games, but will exclusively lend his baseball know-how to 3DO to assist with the design), High Heat Baseball 2001 has made extensive efforts to be the most realistic playing ball game on the PlayStation. This year, Team .366 has focused on the ballplayers AI, especially in the batter/pitcher match-ups. On the mound, pitchers are more lethal opponents, and they work the batters more intelligently to psyche them out: They try to push the batters off the plate with inside pitches, then toss outside when the players are off their guard. 3DO has also implemented a new broadcast-style camera system to follow the game, and improved graphics in the player models and facial textures (stars will be instantly visible by way of this feature). To assist beginner players, there's even a batting cage and a training difficulty level, to allow gamers to practice their game.

In the end, HH2001 delivers a solid experience. Maybe not the most visually impressive, but authentic in feel, presentation, and gameplay. And no, there aren't any Army Men in it...that we know of. GR





gamers' republic sports

HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001

developer: team .366 publisher: 3DO available: now

Truth be told, Sammy Sosa Softball Slam was not made for the die-hard baseball gamer looking for an authentic, statistics-heavy simulation game, nor for the player looking for a beautifully crafted, brilliantly textured sports title. No, this game is for those people who perhaps are weekend (couch) warriors who play with their friends after work or on Saturday afternoons. Or maybe this game was made for those looking to play a baseball game but don't want to deal with all the nonsense involved with the typical video game baseball franchises. On these levels, this game works just fine.

Graphically, other than special fireball effects when hitting home runs or power throwing, the game doesn't really offer a lot of eye candy. As a matter of fact, the graphics are rather poor, but there are some humorous player animations included in the game, like batters stomping on the ground when they strike out or skinny fielders getting plowed over by fat runners.

In an effort to simulate the tendencies of the average "just playing for fun" players who play the actual sport, the game's player AI will sometimes miss the ball hit right to them, or sometimes throw the ball wide of the base intended. Players can also make inside-the-park home runs if their batter's speed ability meter is high enough. Each player is rated from one to ten on power, accuracy and speed.

I found that the ending of a game is somewhat uninspiring, although after completing a tournament, there is a short FMV video clip of real people celebrating a win – but still, I kind of expected a little more flash.

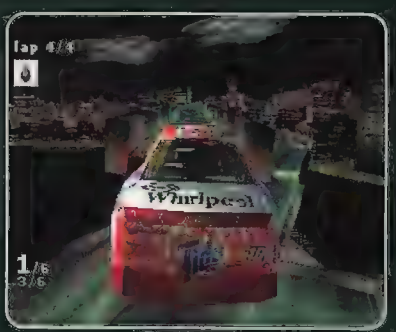
Although I enjoyed playing the game, sadly, I think my favorite aspect of the game has to be the ambient sounds, both those of the environment—the birds and the bees—and of the chatter of the players. They add to the overall experience of playing this fun but average outing from 3DO. GR

gamers' republic sports

SAMMY SOSA SOFTBALL SLAM

developer/publisher: 3DO available: april

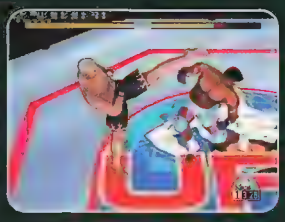
The only racing game I know of that may wriggle a "yahoo" out of seemingly normal humans, Nascar Rumble rides like Cole Trickle's wet dream. Seen *Days of Thunder*? You know the one—Cruise, Kidman, Duvall and lots of guys that liked to bang into each other at 200 mph. Well, I think they had the rent-a-car scene from that one in mind when they sculpted this here racer—except on this ride you get to drive the real thing and pretend to be the real dudes. All the big names are here: Elliott, Gordon, Andretti, Petty, Waltrip, Bodine. You won't find them on their usual beats, though. Think of NR as a sort of Nascar version of Mario Kart, just with more tracks, a heap of shortcuts not seen since Beetle Adventure, a quiver of excellent hidden vehicles, and a bevy of locales from cities to beaches to the deepest backwoods. Each is well represented too, exhibiting almost no clipping even on long stretches of detailed highway among impressively liquid frame rates. The car models are also worth a mention, wrapped in shiny reflections and textured down to the smallest decal with loving care. NR is definitely not a quick attempt to cash in on the extreme guise, but a fully realized kart-type racer with a tongue-imbedded-in-cheek NASCAR edge. The game's not without its faults: at times things get downright too crazy onscreen and the vast majority of hick-tastic one liners—"I believe the concept here is to win, dude"—tend to wear on a bit. But these are miniscule in the grand scheme of things. If you're looking for a little humor and diversity to go with your NASCAR diet, do rip off a big ol' chunk of NR jerky. You'll be glad ya' did! GR

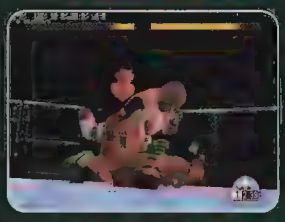


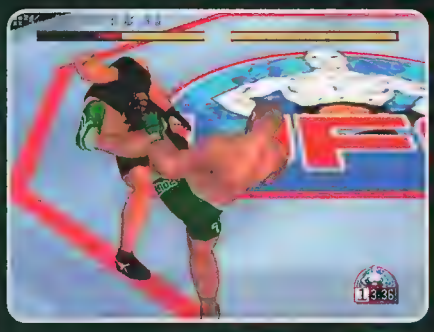
gamers' republic sports

NASCAR RUMBLE

developer/publisher: electronic arts available: now







As you have probably read earlier on in our Frontlines section, we have been fortunate enough to follow this game from a very early stage. The UFC has a core audience that has steadily increased, thanks to word of mouth, and with the imminent release of this game, the sport will surely hit a new high. The combatants of the UFC represent a wide variety of styles, and you'll see everything from Jujitsu to a bit of old-fashioned street fighting. And at a blazing 60 fps, you can expect each fighter to look pretty damn close to his real-life counterpart, moving with an uncanny level of realism.

Crave expects that each character will be composed of at least 5,000 polys. Expect details like fully articulated hands and feet, as well as realistic facial textures. Now if you aren't a fan of the sport, and don't know what it is or who is considered "cool" among the "in" crowd, you can create a player with a Career mode that will allow you to work your player up the ranks. The system will give you a set number of points to work with, and the given attributes will help form your fighter as you try to take him to the top.

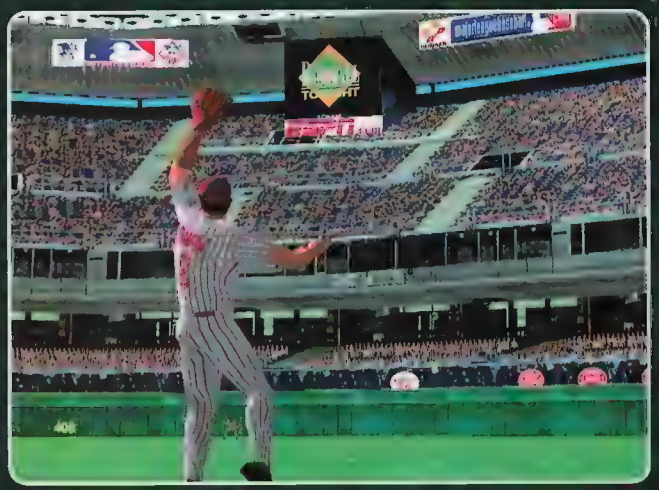
This will be Crave's first non-acquisition title and it does so with a development team that includes former Tekken, Soul Edge and Tobal members. Needless to say, we are all excited to get a feel for the action first hand. **GR**

gamers' republic sports

ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP

developer/publisher: crave available: june

ESPN Baseball Tonight isn't just about our viewing an authentic reproduction of baseball: Konami has some plans to deliver an experience beyond what we've seen before. It all begins with baseball icon Barry Bonds, who will be the spokesperson for the game. In addition to showing off his debonair good looks on the cover, he's also lent his hand to the development side of things. The developers have extracted Bonds' knowledge on the intricacies of numerous MLB stars, including specific batting styles and pitcher attributes, as well as info on MLB parks, including field conditions, best home-run alleys, and fan personalities. Having played in the Bay Area, I'm sure he's got lots to talk about.



Bonds' input, along with the development team's experience in baseball gaming, turns into the few bits of solid gameplay info we know on the title. You can expect speed-sensitive throwing, with twelve different pitches to choose from, dependent on the pitcher. The pitcher and batter interface has been made analog for the game, and you'll need to use the added control, because players have specific strike zones. Whether the pitching can also be fine-tuned through the analog shoulder buttons is yet to be seen.

In addition to these gameplay changes, we've also been informed that the game will feature a Create-a-Player option that allows you to build players based on physical attributes, batting stances, and pitching characteristics, and an all new mode of play where all-star teams are chosen for an All-Star Extravaganza.

Let's hope Konami's first time at bat is something to remember and not just a quick push to be the first on the market with a home-grown baseball title. **GR**

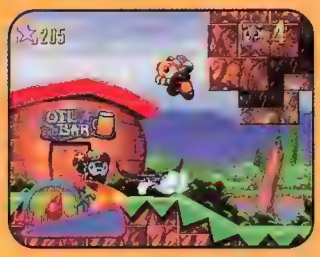
gamers' republic sports

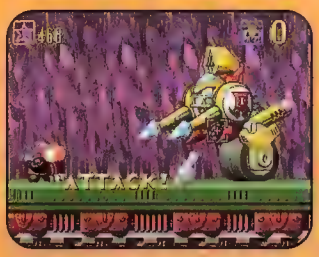
ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT

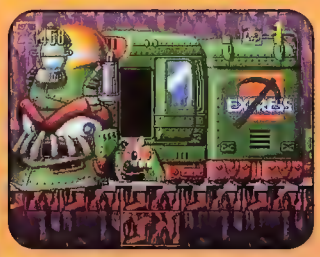
developer: disney interactive/ESPN/konami publisher: konami available: april

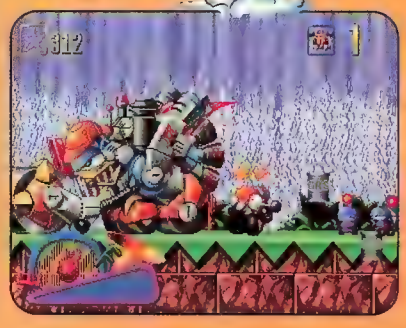
TRYRUSH DEPPY

(publisher) Nihon Create
(genre) action/platform
(system) Saturn
(year) 1996









TryRush Deppy correlates with the GRkive moniker more for its genre than its age, but with Strider 2 passing through this month, along with news of its U.S. release, it seems appropriate to dig into the lock-up once again for some not-so-long-lost 2D treasure. For those of you who never embraced the short-lived tenure of the Sega Saturn—touted as a 3D machine on par with the PlayStation, while it was actually perfectly bred for 2D—here's a look at one of its many quirky and obscure platformers, TryRush Deppy.

An old-school platformer to the core, Deppy's one peculiarity is that it stars a cute little taxi cab (straight out of a Tex Avery cartoon) in an exaggerated automotive universe. Developers Nihon Create capitalized on this unusual pretense by infusing a unique array of play mechanics into the proceedings for the game's assortment of killer cars, auto-bots, and vehicular monstrosities. You'll find a fuel gauge in place of the life bar, and Deppy walks on his back tires. His grill and headlamps make up his cute little face and he attacks by, you guessed it, rushing his enemies. Aside from these oddities, Deppy is, for the most part, as straightforward as run 'n' jump side scrollers get (or should I say got). The graphics are bright and colorful, there's generous parallax scrolling, and plenty of effects from the old 2D spellbook floating around in the backgrounds. While Deppy is quite challenging and fun overall (though a little slow around the edges), the game's main draw probably lies in its collectibility. Games like Deppy are why God created eBay. **-Dave Halverson**

world republic

World Republic Report • location **chiba, japan** • reported by **tatsuki miura** • **feb 25-26, 2000**

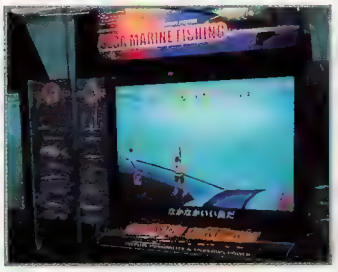
aou show japan

On February 25 and 26, the 19th Amusement Operators Union 2000 Amusement Expo took place at the Makuhari Messe convention center in Chiba, Japan, where 58 companies displayed their latest arcade machines. There was an array of machines on display: video games, music games, sports games, UFO catchers, Print Club machines, and more. The following is a rundown of some of the more interesting games at the show.

SEGA

Star Wars Racer Arcade Not to be confused with the LucasArts PC and N64 games, this is another 3D racing game based on the podracing sequence in *Star Wars Episode 1*. You have to use two engine levers to control speed and steering, just like in the movie. Using a special expanded cabinet (like the original Daytona), you can race against up to three other players.

Marine Fishing Sega's latest fishing sim offers a step beyond Get Bass, allowing you to hunt an array of ocean-dwelling fish, rather than just, well, bass.



Virtua NBA Perhaps the most realistic basketball game ever. This is proper 5-on-5 basketball, using the Naomi board to create an arcade game that remains true to the spirit of the real sport. Just like Sega's Virtua Striker (the arcade soccer game), the game's control is very simple, but lets you pull off many tricky plays.

Power Smash Continuing Sega's lineup of sports titles is this Naomi-driven tennis game, with smooth, detailed renditions of eight real-life tennis stars. Given the hardware it's running on, a Dreamcast port is probably in the works.

Virtual On Oratorio Tangram M.S.B.S. Ver. 5.66 This new version of Virtual On 2 is equipped with VMU slots, allowing you to use your modified Virtuaroids from the Dreamcast version of VO2. Also, four of the DC version's original stages and a few entirely new Virtuaroids have been added.

Other games Nippon TV-type Future Predicting Studio (as the name suggests, it's a future-prediction game based on a TV game show), Quiz Ah! Megami-sama (a trivia game based on Kosuke Fujishima's manga series), and Touch De Uno (a selection of simple twitch-style games).

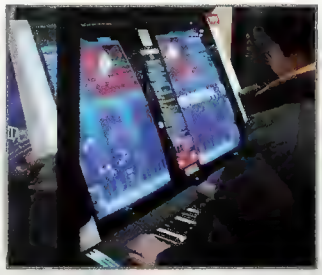
Konami

GTI-CLUB Corso Italiano This is the sequel to Konami's fashionable and fun driving game (check our previous AOU coverage for a look at the earlier game). You get to drive through rural settings in the mountains and coast of Italy in an array of great-looking European classic cars.

more Konami

Dancing Stage with DREAMS COME TRUE A successor to the first Dancing Stage, which featured the music of Japanese pop group True Kiss Destination, this game includes music from group DREAMS COME TRUE. The soundtrack was gathered from among 10 of DCT's albums.

Keyboard Mania The latest Bemani music game, it uses two 24-key Yamaha keyboards to realistically simulate making music. This is the most complex music game interface, allowing an unprecedented level of complexity. If you choose the double-play mode, you'd better be a real pianist!



PunchMania-Hokuto no Ken Basically, this is a simple QTE-style game, but it's much more interesting than others of its ilk. A set of Punch Pads pop up when enemies onscreen attack you. When the lights on the Punch Pads flash, punch the pads with the gloves to thwack the enemy. If the timing of your attack is precise, you can even do special attacks.

Other games Muscle Ranking StrikeOut! (a baseball-tossing game based on the TV game show you may have heard of), and GI - Leading Sire, a peculiar horse-racing game.

Namco

Truck Kyousoukyoku Similar to Dekotora Densetsu for the PlayStation, this is an Art Truck Racing game. The gameplay is very dynamic — that and the neat-looking arcade cabinet drew plenty of crowds. The BGM is Enka, an old-fashioned genre of Japanese music that remains quite popular.

New Japan Pro Wrestling Toukon Retsuden 4 Arcade Edition This is an arcade version of the Yuke's-developed Dreamcast wrestling game, running on the Naomi hardware. This is one of the games that uses Namco's new Cyber Lead II platform that can load data from the PS memory card and DC VMU.

Golgo 13 A sniper-type light-gun game that features the cool, collected assassin star of the legendary manga "Golgo 13" (126 comic books, 60 million copies sold in 32 years).

World Kicks This soccer game uses a unique interface to control the soccer ball. When you shoot and pass, you have to kick the balls affixed below the cabinet. It runs on the Naomi board, but given its unique control, a Dreamcast version may not be in the cards.

Aqua Rush This is a Tetris-style puzzle game, but the blocks you have to fit together don't come in pre-set shapes. Instead, you have to manipulate blocks of a single type in order to arrange them in advantageous patterns.

Super World Stadium 2000 Although Namco's latest in their famous baseball series also uses the Cyber Lead II system, there's no Namco-developed baseball game for the Dreamcast, so the VMU slot isn't particularly useful right now. But will World Stadium reach the Dreamcast sometime soon?

Taito

Densha de Go! 3 Not much to say – it's the new version of Taito's famous train simulator, using the latest Taito arcade board, Type Zero. The graphics are improved, but the gameplay won't confuse players of the earlier games.

Psyvariar Just when we begin to think the genre is in jeapordy, someone surprises us with yet another shooter. This time it's Taito's new vertical shooter, based around the Buzz system, where you have to closely dodge enemy fire in order to power up your ship.

Landing High Japan Taito is now releasing a flight simulator to accompany their train simulator. Perhaps it's a tuned-up version of Jet de Go! for the PlayStation.

CAPCOM

The latest in Capcom's Versus series is powered by the Naomi board (rather than Capcom's CPS2), which should provide an even more frenetic experience for fans of both heroic universes. Together with a 3-on-3 battles feature and more than 28 selectable characters (including Star Gladiator's Hayato and Capcom veteran Son Son), the game is a joy to play. As you can see in the picture, you can hook up a DC controller to the cabinet (Spawn, in this case), and it's also equipped with VMU slots. If you insert a card with data from the Dreamcast version of Marvel Vs. Capcom, they say something quite interesting will happen.

Until next year....

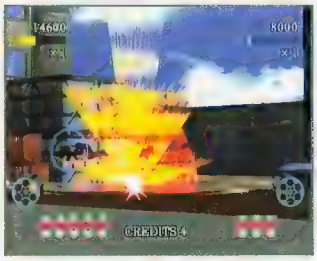
Although the number of people at AOU 2000 increased from last year, it didn't have quite the impact of last year's show, when we saw Naomi and Dead or Alive 2 debut. We were expecting to see Virtua Fighter 4, Tekken 4, Soul Calibur 2, and SNK vs. Capcom. When can we see these games? Hopefully we won't have to wait yet another year.

電気製品

World Republic Review • developer: am2 • publisher: sega • available: now

virtua cop 2

AM2's classic Model 2 arcade shooter makes its way to the Dreamcast, courtesy of the PC version.



It may be five years old, but Virtua Cop 2 still manages to deliver a healthy wallop of shooting action. Playing out like an old-school John Woo fever dream, it's a testament to the razor-sharp, arcade instincts of AM2 that it remains as fun today as it did years ago.

Slightly re-textured over the arcade original (and owing much to the PC port), the low-cost VC2 isn't meant to be a showcase for the Dreamcast's rendering abilities, and as such, it retains the original's now-nostalgic starkness. If it's beauty you want, we suggest The House of the Dead 2, but there's definitely something appealing about VC2's rudimentary visuals, provided your mind is open to such things.

Old fashioned though it may be, nothing can take away from the sheer coolness of the game's design. From the frantic car chases to the little touches like being able to blast apart watermelons in the kitchen scene, VC2 is very well executed, on both a micro and macro level. Enemies pour out from every corner, but not in some random fashion, rather in a carefully calculated rhythm, a bit like a dance, and it makes the simple shooting routine about as entertaining as it can be.

A U.S. release is currently up in the air for Virtua Cop 2, so this import may be your only chance to relive the pure action of AM2's light-gun classic. **-m. hobbs**

B-

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PlayStation Review

WILDROID 9

The PlayStation's most underrated action game has undergone the full Japanese localization treatment with spectacular results. This is Shiny's first game to enter Japan; maybe Japanese players will see what Americans failed to embrace—how fulfilling torturing your fellow man can be. Beyond the new Manga-style art and Japanese text, Wild 9, well, Wildroid 9 (sounds like a nasty rectal infection) has undergone gameplay and graphics refinements as well, making it an even better platformer than it already was. It also looks freakin' awesome on the PS2, which cleans it up even more. A sweet import if there ever was one! **-d. halverson**

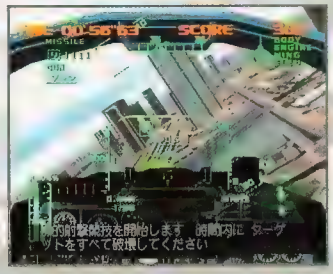
World Republic Review • developer: cri • publisher: csk • available: now

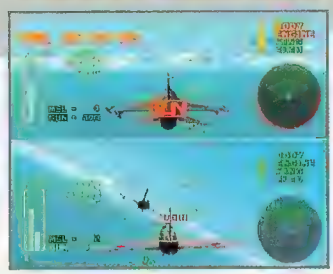
aero dancing F

It's not the Ace Combat clone that some of us wanted, and Aero Dancing F remains highly esoteric.

Unlike most, I actually liked the first Aero Dancing. My embarrassing desire to destroy things was temporarily quelled—not that I wouldn't have enjoyed unloading a few missiles.

Developers CRI listened to the cries for destruction, and the end result is Aero Dancing F, a decidedly, well, Aero Dancing-like take on the subject of forced entropy. Meaning, any dreams of a game marrying a sophisticated flight model and the action of Ace Combat should be tossed out the window. Oh, the physics are there, but the action is horribly dry and intricate. Isn't that's just so Aero Dancing?





Like the original, there are no missions, no political uprisings to thwart—just big, industrial-strength balloons and dogfighting for one or two players, with a welcome cable link mode included. But because of the advanced nature of the physics, even simple trials require a lot of effort. In Ace Combat, your plane pretty much goes where you point it, but that's not the case here, as you really have to fly the plane and be very aware of where you are in relation to your targets. This is the sort of thing that will attract fans of the first and repel anyone wanting a better version of Air Force Delta.

Because of its quirks, Aero Dancing F is not any more appealing than the original despite its slightly more adventuresome intentions. Like the first, it's only suited to aircraft buffs, freaks like me who actually care that the planes can deploy airbrakes. **-m. hobbs**

C+

virtua cop 2 © sega 2000. aero dancing f © csk 2000.

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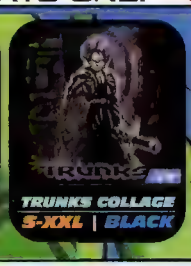
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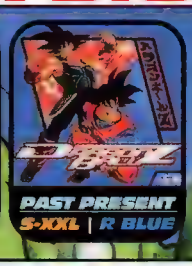
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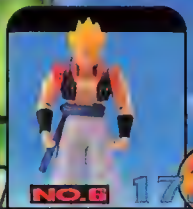
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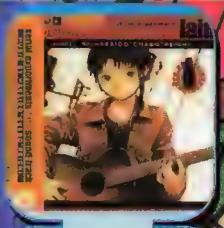
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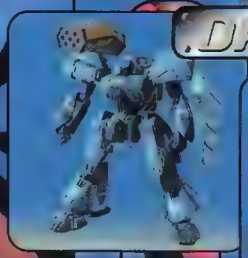
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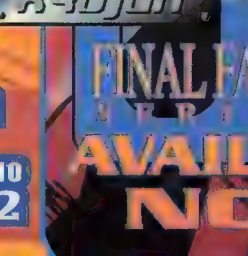
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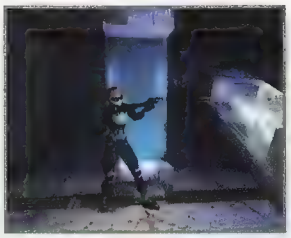
the ring

Exorcise your demons in virtual reality in this newest knockoff of Resident Evil



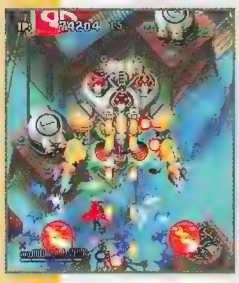
It must be destiny that I get to play both The Ring and Eternal Ring in the same issue. While Eternal Ring is an RPG on PS2, The Ring is an action horror game in the vein of Resident Evil and its ilk. Code Veronica essentially set the standard for this sort of game on Dreamcast, and The Ring unfortunately doesn't live up to it. At first glance it is difficult to tell it is even a serious game. When accepting menu items, there is a big "splat" noise, like you're squashing a fly in Donkey Kong 64. Then the voice and character design in the opening CG movie only make you laugh. The story, which is based on a Japanese series, centers around a pixie-looking woman named Meg Rainman. Investigating the mysterious death of her boyfriend Robert, you soon enter a virtual reality program called The Ring, where the game takes on more horror proportions, even reminiscent of Silent Hill at times. The music can be maddening and the control often gets in the way of killing things. I think this game might only be appealing to fans of the TV show, which in America are about as easy to find as a cow with spots shaped like Gary Coleman. **-j.r. haugen**

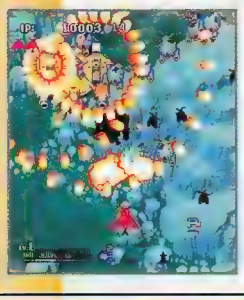
C+

World Republic Review • developer psikyo • publisher capcom • available in japan now

gunbird 2

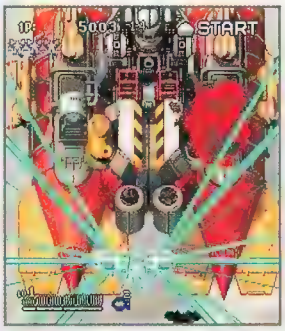
Psikyo stays true to form with Gunbird 2, their wacky, wonderfully drawn redux of Strikers 1945 II





I love overhead shooters, and it's so nice to see them being released to this day on 128-bit hardware, at least in Japan. Psikyo's Gunbird 2 may be 2D and old-fashioned, but its animation, sprite design, and rock-hard arcade difficulty make it a near-perfect dose of old school shooter action, provided one is into such things of course.

The power-up system and shot meter used in Gunbird 2 will be instantly recognizable to anyone who's familiar with Strikers 1945 II, Psikyo's WWII-themed overhead shooter, and presumably Gunbird 1, though I've never played it. Each of the highly differentiated characters has a specific style of powered-up shot, earned as you go about your destructive business. Some provide a measure of shielding, while most are just supremely powerful blasts—and it's worth noting that one flies around as the sometimes humourously designed characters in Gunbird 2, not in planes or ships, recalling Techno Soft's Elemental Master for Genesis.



With companies like Psikyo around, the overhead shooter should be with us for awhile longer. I certainly don't want to see them go away, as there will always be room for mindless action experiences, whatever the number of bits. **-m. hobbs**

B-

Japanese Games Release List: April/May 2000

PlayStation

4/20	Rockman DASH2	Capcom
	Wizardry DiMGUIL	ASCII
	Option Tuning Car Btl Spec R	TMO
	Dancing Stage feat. DCT	Konami
4/27	Kinniku Banzuke	Konami
	Luna Wing	Shoueisha/Takara
April	Breath of Fire IV	Namco
	Raycrisis	Taito
	Devil Man	Bandai
5/2	Brave Saga 2	Takara
	Space Battle Ship Yamato	Bandai
5/18	DanceDanceRev 3rd Mix	Konami
	Victory Boxing	Victor
5/25	Acuallianage	ESP
	Metal Slug X	SNK

PlayStation 2

4/13	Sky Surfer	Idea Factory
	Gradius III & IV	Konami
4/27	Primal Image Vol.1	Atlus
April	Snowboard Super Cross	EA Square
	American Arcade	Astrol
	EX billiard	Takara
	Ever Grace	From Software
5/25	Hresvelgr	Gust
May	Buchikire Kongo	ArtDink

Dreamcast

4/27	Sentimental Graffiti 2	NEC
	Power Stone2	Capcom
	DDR 2nd Mix Club Version	Konami
	Kitenretsu Shonen S	Sega
	Sosarian	Victor
	Samba de Amigo	Sega
5/25	Rent a Hero No.1	Sega
	Super Runabout	Climax

Nintendo 64

4/7	Gauntlet Legend	Epoch
4/27	Legend of Zelda Mujora	Nin.
4/26	Nushi Tsuri 64	Victor/FSH

Game Boy Color

4/13	Monster Capsul	Konami
4/21	Dino Breeder	J Wing
4/27	Hunter X Hunter	Konmi
	Metal Gear Ghost Babel	Konami
4/28	Poyon's Dungeon Room 2	
April	Mumin's Adventure	Sun Soft
5/12	Soul Getter	Microcabin
5/25	Taito Memorial Chase H.Q.	Jordan
May	Dungeon Saver	J Wing

Neo Geo Pocket Color

4/27	Ogre Battle	SNK
April	Memories off Pure	Kid

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VOOGIE'S ANGEL

REVIEWED BY DAVE HALVERSON
•2000 ANIME WORKS
90 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★1/2 FANTASY/ADVENTURE

Tired of scantily clad honeys coming to the rescue every time mankind gets in a fix? Well, too bad! Because the Earth has fallen into the hands of alien invaders forcing humankind to take up residence on the ocean floor. Their only hope for survival as they attempt to regain control of what land is left lies with five half-human/half-mechanized hotties controlled by one Dr. Crimpt, a crack cyborg designer if there ever was one. Full of tongue-in-cheek humor, high-pitched lip service and more D-cups than an episode of *V.I.P.*, Masami Ubari's latest delivers exactly what his fans have grown to love. Whether that's a good thing I suppose is a matter of taste. I personally can't get enough when it comes to well-assembled chick cinema. But we've definitely been here before.

The feisty (and busty) leader of this band of mechanical dolls, Voogie, is telepathically linked with the girls' transport, Strikemyer, a cute little spaceship that packs a mighty punch. In a classic case of art imitating life, after Strikemyer fires its mighty load, it loses all power – just about enough sexual dysfunction for one anime, wouldn't you say? On their way to saving the human race, Voogie, Rebecca, Shiori, Merrybell, and Midi wrestle with all sorts of demons in what turns out to be as much an emotional roller coaster ride as it is 90 minutes of straightforward action. First, they save the humans from certain extinction only to be rejected by their military leaders and then later, as they go in for the kill against the aliens' own cyborgs and ultimate weapon, the hyper cannon, their human backgrounds are revealed to them by their dying comrade as a gift. This takes each girl through the tribulations that faced them as the Earth was overrun and gives them the power they need to go absolutely bonkers and beat the stink out of the bad guys. Meanwhile, in true *Sailor Moon* fashion, they call out each mighty attack "Lightning bolt Sword!" as the enemies spout out such compelling dialogue as "The history of man is a pathetic chronicle of violent apes mindlessly slaughtering each other for control of a planet they ultimately brought to ruin. It is a circle of madness that ends now!" Eat your heart out, Roland Emerich. Enveloped by quality animation, a very good dub, and a dramatic score, Voogie's Angels delivers 90 minutes of bouncy fun and perfunctory sci-fi, with an order of cornball drama on the side. **GR**

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PHOTON THE IDIOT MENACE

REVIEWED BY DAVE HALVERSON
•2000 CENTRAL PARK MEDIA
60 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★★1/2 ACTION/DRAMA

Tenchi Muyo is okay. I certainly wouldn't call myself a fan (too fruity), but I respect the fact that it has struck a chord with so many fans. I hadn't heard of *Photon* when the screener came in, but flipping over the sleeve I noticed that it was from the same creative team, with character designs by Masaki Kajishima and a script by Yousuko Kurodo. So my expectations were low as I slid it to the bottom of the stack of this month's booty. Surprises don't come often enough in this business, but when they do, it's extremely gratifying. It turns out that I had saved the best for last. There is so much to love about *Photon* that I don't know where to begin. The writing, the animation, the character and vehicle designs, the universe, and even the dubbing, are all superb.

The story begins as Keyne, a comely young matron with sex appeal to burn, shoots through the stars, trying to shake the sleazy sexual deviant/royal buffoon Count Papacha. He's planted a transmitter in her underwear and prior to shooting her down (we find out why he's trying to later), projects himself holographically into her flying domicile to view his handiwork. By the time Keyne finds the transmitter and gets rid of the pesky pervert, the ship is already too far gone. As it plunges towards the Sandy Planet below, a marker pen mixed in with the wreckage peeling off the ship falls to the ground. Like the Coke bottle in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, it's instantly regarded as a holy object and figures into the story with regularity and hilarity.

Next we meet the small, soft-spoken Photon, a pint-sized little guy with eyes that cover half of his head and the strength of 100 men. He's been asked (for the 47th time) to go after Aun, whom he has sworn to protect. Aun is a crazy young teenage girl with raging hormones, a perpetual bad hair day, and some devastating powers of her own. This may be a hayseed desert planet but its occupants hold many secrets. Aun has gone scooting across the vast desert plains in search of her latest object of infatuation, Laman, a troubadour who made the mistake of making eye contact with her during his last performance in a neighboring city. Soon enough all of these characters intersect and the result is one of the funniest, most cleverly written and gorgeous-looking animes you'll ever see. *Photon* melds sci-fi, humor, adventure, sex appeal, and a little love story and manages to do them all with the utmost flare and style. Nearly every scene is a memorable one from beginning to end. One can only hope that integrity holds up through the entire three-tape run. The series is rated for viewers 13 and up and although the nudity is done tastefully, I think they should boost that to 16. The mere suggestion of Papacha's genitals, covered porno-style by obtrusive black dots during a hilarious scene, is enough to send younger kids into a potentially vein-bursting giggle frenzy. **GR**

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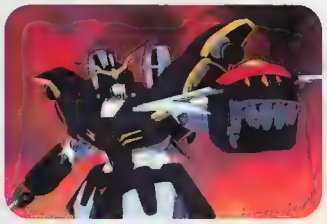
GUNDAM WING VOL. 1

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA ALEXANDER
•2000 BANDAI
60 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★★ ACTION/DRAMA

What makes *Gundam* so damn cool, anyway? Is it the non-stop fights, or maybe the fact that the mech pilots are five teenage boys who shouldn't even have driver's licenses, let alone giant mecha licenses? Then again, maybe it's the EVA-sized mecha armed with anything from huge forearm-mounted Gatling guns to a Thermal Powered Death Scythe. Yeah. A Thermal Powered Death Scythe. You can't go wrong with a weapon with a name like that.

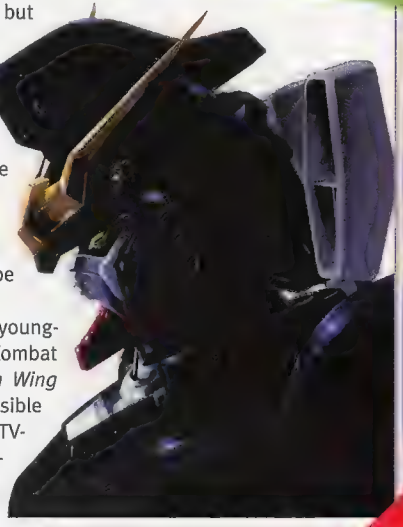


In this next installment from the epic world of Gundam, the battle continues between Earth and the colonies that started way back in *Gundam oo8o War in the Pocket*. There are only five Gundams this time. But five are more than enough for the Earth Alliance and OZ, as the mecha and their prepubescent pilots wreak havoc at several military bases. The Gundams seem to be on special missions to destroy all other mobile suits. Whose side are the Gundams on anyway? Who's giving them their orders?

The main character, a Gundam pilot named Hiro Yui, has some mech trouble during his current mission. He runs into a young girl his own age named Rayleena. She seems very interested in him, but Hiro seems to want nothing to do with her. In fact, he seems like an inhuman maniac with god-like strength who will kill anyone, including Rayleena, in order to accomplish his mission. Against good solid common sense, Rayleena just can't leave Hiro, the psycho boy pilot, alone.

Between the massive Gundam battles, the mysterious plot, and the random suicide missions by Hiro, Gundam Wing looks to be the best of the Gundam series yet.

You'd think the giant-robot-piloted-by-a-young-boy ploy would be deader than the Mortal Kombat fighting games by this point. But *Gundam Wing* does it better than anyone else, the possible exception being *Evangelion*, of course. With TV-quality animation and some of the best dubbing I have ever heard, *Gundam Wing* is a must have for any mecha-head. GR

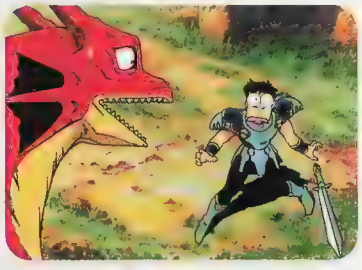


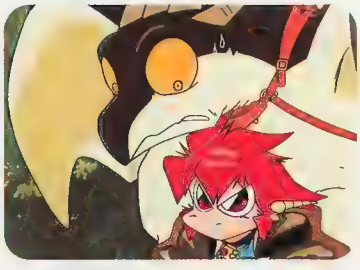
DRAGON HALF

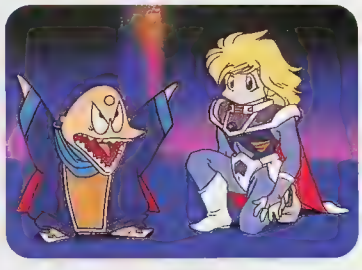
REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA ALEXANDER
•2000 ADV FILMS
60 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★★ FANTASY/COMEDY

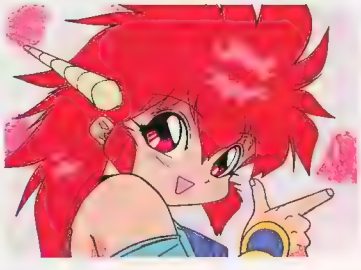
SAUUUCERRRRR! Idol singers, dragon slayers, slime-halfs, brutal killer martial arts tournaments, and Ex-Lax—all the ingredients of my favorite comedy anime of all time. *Dragon Half* is one hour of the strangest, most bizarre animation to ever grace a TV screen.

Good Lord! It's a mechanical bird! Mink is a young girl who is half human and half dragon—essentially a Dragon-half. And like any girl her age, Mink is currently obsessed with the latest idol singer, Dick Saucer. Unfortunately for Mink, Saucer would rather kill dragons instead of dating them. If only she were a full human, then maybe she and Dick Saucer could live happily ever after. So Mink tries to find a way to lose her wings and tail. Mink manages to also run afoul of the region's royal family in her crusade to become wingless. And to top things off, she can't even go to the upcoming Saucer concert. Life is so very hard when you can breathe fire and possess a lizard tail.









I will now bestow upon *Dragon Half* the award for having the best dubbing I have ever heard. And the voices are downright silly. So why the award? Because this dub stays the most true to its original Japanese counterpart. The translation is practically perfect, and the English-speaking voices matched the original voices very closely. Not only were the voices accurate and believable, but they also achieved the funny little sounds that truly characterize Japanese voice acting. These small, but terribly important, sounds are either lacking or poorly done in every other dubbed anime. The voice quality is also pivotal in making *Dragon Half* what it is, as they contribute much to the laugh factor.

The animation is "comedy" quality, and the characters spend most of their onscreen time in Super-Deformed mode.

And definitely stick around to listen to the ending credits song that is sung to Beethoven's 5th symphony—a bizarre little ditty dedicated to eggs and tomatoes. GR

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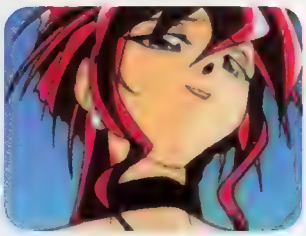
SORCERER HUNTERS: SPELL WARS VOL. 2

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA ALEXANDER
•2000 ADV FILMS
90 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★ FANTASY/ADVENTURE

Poor *Sorcerer Hunters*. No matter how hard this anime tries, it never seems to be able to claw its way out of the depths of mediocrity. But at least *Spell Wars* makes the *Sorcerer Hunters* series bearable again. In *Spell Wars*, one of the major elements missing from the earlier episodes of *Sorcerer Hunters*, finally makes a showing, and the main plot, which was hinted at way back in tape one, starts to advance.



The war between Big Mamma and Zaha now seems imminent, while the purpose of the Sorcerer Hunters is slowly revealed.

Most of the voices seem to have been changed for the better. Well, except for Tira's voice, which has taken a rather fierce nosedive towards intolerable.

Zaha reveals more of his plans for world destruction by showing a pointed interest in Carrot's special ability. And finally in this installment of *Sorcerer Hunters* we, the patient viewers, are rewarded with the best and longest fight since the series began. The Hunters are finally presented with a challenge in their dangerous foe Zaha.

Sorcerer Hunters still has a chance to become a good anime. This could be achieved by laying off the melodramatic cheese and really getting to the point with Zaha. I also think that having Tira and Chocolate become truly useful members of the team would help. This anime has already taken a step in the right direction by making Carrot a useful and invaluable member of the team—that is, when he's not getting kicked in the jewels by disgruntled women. **GR**

SOL BIANCA: THE LEGACY

REVIEWED BY DAVE HALVERSON
•2000 PIONEER ENTERTAINMENT
60 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★★ ACTION/DRAMA

Everyone's favorite band of female space pirates is back, after two OAVs, with a new series and a new look. This time out, they've warped over from ADV to Pioneer and picked up some of the latest strides in digital animation along the way. The look of the series has undergone a major facelift and the results are stunning. *Sol Bianca: The Legacy* looks good enough for the big screen. The 3D rendered visuals blend in with the traditional-looking characters almost seamlessly, and all of the women are drawn softer and appear more dimensional than before with greater attention to the finer details like hair and clothing. The lighting and special effects are also indicative of a project, with a budget to match the talent and concept behind them. Original animation director and character designer Naoyuki Onda lends his talents once again, as does original concept designer Tori Miura.

The characters remain the same—June is the ship's pilot and soul, April runs the show, Feb is the sultry dark-skinned vamp, May is a parody of every cute squeaky anime lass there's ever been, and Janny's the resident tomboy, although she's looking better than ever under that short hair.

In the first episode, "The Emblem," April and company drop in on an illegal auction where the stolen Flintlock pistol, given to April by her dying aunt, is being sold to the highest bidder. They're not the only ones after the ancient Earth artifact, though, and things get pretty dicey, culminating in a euphoric scene as June and the Bianca, shall we say, merge. The next episode, "Memories," dabbles in the chronicles of Dante's Divine Comedy, the twisted ramblings of the exiled poet/politician. In an episode that plays more like an episode of *Star Trek*, the girls visit the planet Consegra and a place called Mega Seed where Dante's fictional journey of Heaven and Hell seems to have materialized. June and the mysterious stowaway they picked up in episode one, Mayo, are trapped within the strange purgatory and, guided by a "3D hologram graphic user interface" (a big purple genie), they attempt to discover the ultimate treasure promised to whomever can survive Hell's fury. As the second episode comes to a close, all you'll be able to think about is how long you'll have to wait for the next. Great stuff indeed. **GR**

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Yonosuke Hikura appears to be an ordinary high school student. Yet he has inherited the important role of protecting the harmony between Heaven and Earth. With the help of the magical sword Chitentai, and Tsukinojo Inbe, a Protector sent to him by the high Priests of Earth, he courageously battles all manner of demons. But when Yonosuke accidentally loses his sword, it falls into the wrong hands and they plan to tear down the gateway between Heaven and Earth, causing untold chaos in the two worlds.

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Yusuke is a young, orphaned high school student who finds himself in the middle of a muddy puddle with a girl who falls right into his lap! Rouge, the mysterious girl who fell from the sky, suffers from amnesia and only remembers her name. Yusuke offers her a place to stay until she regains her memory, but after spending many days playing, shopping, and falling in love, Yusuke suddenly encounters two women who claim to be Rouge's royal sisters. Now, Rouge and Yusuke are threatened with separation.... not only by Rouge's sisters, but also by enemies of the royal family. A touching love story in the spirit of Oh My Goddess! and Video Girl Ai, this beautifully animated video is sure to charm with its tale of impossible love and enchant with its stunning visuals.

LEGEND OF THE LAST LABYRINTH

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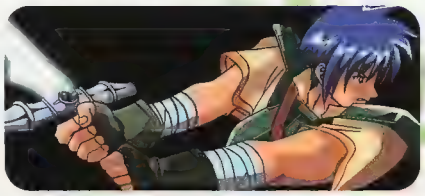
DRAGOON

REVIEWED BY SHOLA AKINNUSO
•2000 ADV FILMS
90 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★ *FANTASY/ADVENTURE*

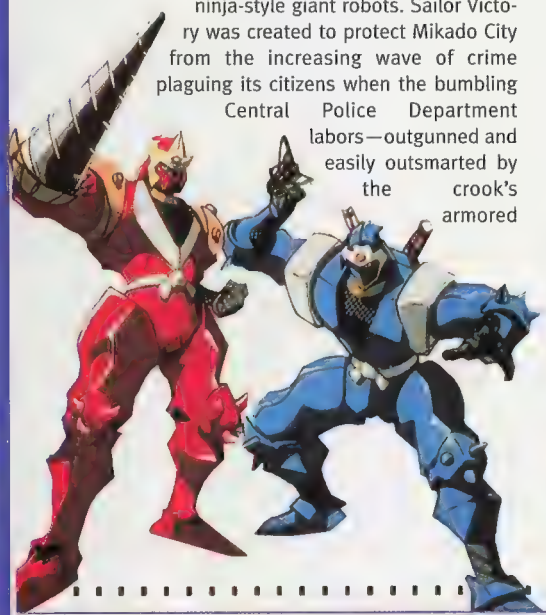
The days of emphatic and philosophical anime are long buried, revered only by your Rin Taro, Miyazaki, or Shirow students. In their places come endless waves of less-inspired anime auteurs, content in simply following a workable formula that has become more diluted with every trite production. *Dragoon* is the umpteenth domestic release to capitalize on the anime/fantasy market made popular by *The Record of Lodoss Wars*, upheld by the superlative *Vision of Escaflowne*, and ultimately sullied with this latest entry among the countless others that have made their bids. *Dragoon* almost embraces its mediocrity. Young swordsman Sedon finds a helpless and naked May, the mysterious girl who panics when recalling her past, and steals the hero's heart with the sole power of her presence. Of course, she hides a greater secret and energy, and it's on that quest to protect her from the Evil Empire and their cardboard soldiers that Sedon meets with his predictable troupe. Insert your handsome exiled Prince, handy with the bo-staff, a scandalous big-boobed sorceress, and Sedon's little sister, the healer, who tags along for the sake of adventure, and you've made your own insert-a-story, found in any substandard RPG on your PS or Super Nintendo. The production values are television quality at best, and we're not talking *Eva*-level, either. Action scenes show only the most important frames, with cuts that happen either too quickly, or too often, to fully absorb the importance. Insert self-lampooning dialogue, average voice-dubbing, and the cheesiest climax line of the decade as Sedon faces the foe that crippled his father, "This one's for love!" and you've got a perfectly good paperweight. **GR**



SAILOR VICTORY

REVIEWED BY DAVE HALVERSON
•2000 ANIME WORKS
60 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★ *ACTION/COMEDY*

From a fortress that would make Dr. Evil green with envy, complete with its own flying HQ located beneath a fake lake, Reiko Takagi owns and operates Sailor Victory, which houses four fresh-out-of-high-school girls (well, one's an android) that pilot three ninja-style giant robots. Sailor Victory was created to protect Mikado City from the increasing wave of crime plaguing its citizens when the bumbling Central Police Department labors—outgunned and easily outsmarted by the crook's armored robos—can't keep the peace. To get the inside track on criminal activity one of the girls—the dim-witted Kiyomi—goes undercover as a lackey inside of the PD's special task force where she fetches coffee, serves food and catches more flack than Rick Rockwell at a singles bar. As soon as the opportunity arises (surprise!), Sailor Victory races into action, and a parody of every super vixen that's ever stepped into a mech suit begins. During the latter 30 minutes of the hour-long episode, an evil pink-haired witch, Margarita, and her Marilyn-Manson-meets-Boy-George super robot take the police commissioner hostage. Her demands? Jewelry! Need I say more? Nicely animated, heavy on comedy and action and light on story, *Sailor Victory* seems like the perfect fodder for the *Sailor Moon* set, but because of its *RayEarth*-esque spinning nude transformation scene, it's actually rated for viewers above 13. That could be a tough sell. **GR**



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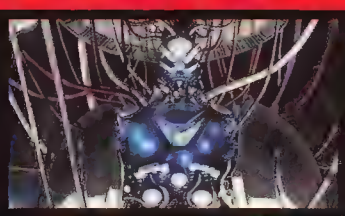

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For "X" theatrical dates in your area and to check out the world premiere of the theatrical trailer visit www.manga.com or www.sputnik7.com.

In English 100 minutes. © 2000 Manga Entertainment Inc. A Palm Pictures Company.

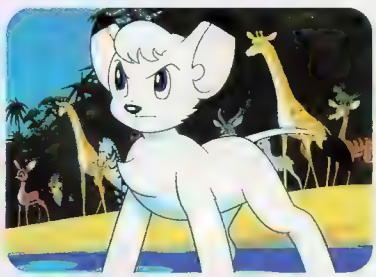
R RESTRICTED
UNDER 17 REQUIRES ACCOMPANYING PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN
Violence, Gore, Some Nudity

KIMBA

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA ALEXANDER
TEZUKA 1967/2000 ADV FILMS/RIGHT STUFF
100 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
ACTION/DRAMA

If you are really curious as to how anime got started, then a good look at *Kimba The White Lion* is a must. *Kimba* was created by Osamu Tezuka, the creator of *Astroboy* and other anime classics. It was also made in 1967...yes, 1967. This stuff is pre-*Speed Racer*. So you won't find any mind-blowing art or state-of-the-art CGI. What you will find, however, is an insightful look back at how anime got started. Kimba is an orphaned white lion living in Africa. The episodes deal with Kimba's life trials, as he struggles to fill his father's mighty shoes as King of the Jungle.

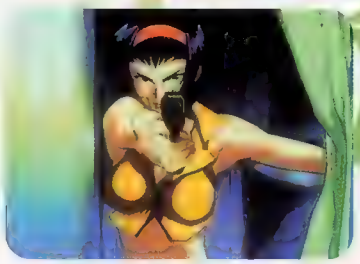
The plots are too simplistic to keep anyone over the age of five interested, but that's not what is important about this anime. You can see the immense American cartoon influence in Kimba, as the Japanese look for their own niche in the world of animation. And through the hefty American influence you can see the beginnings of the distinctive anime-ish style start to take shape. It's always a good idea to step back and take a look at where anime came from in order to correctly appreciate it for what it is today. Kimba is an important addition to the library of any anime fan whose interest goes deeper than just mecha, big hair, and martial arts.



And for anyone who was wondering, yes, there was a small rights controversy over Kimba: the *White Lion* from the '60s and *The Lion King* made by Disney in the '90s. Kimba and Simba... Hmmm. **GR**

COWBOY BEBOP DVD

REVIEWED BY SHOLA AKINNUSO
•1999 BANDAI
125 MINUTES•BILINGUAL DVD
★★★★1/2 *ACTION/DRAMA*



With more style and substance than any anime I've seen in recent memory, Cowboy Bebop bounces saxy jazz and carefree directing into a package that seeps music attitude and writing charisma. Borrowing heavily from '70s anime with streamlined style and western pulp, Bebop is new myth and anime artistry. With tone shifts from the very dramatic (*Asteroid Blues*) to the over-the-top (*Stray Dog Strut*), it's a guaranteed hit with any fan of quality OAVs—especially with all five episodes together in this newest compilation DVD. The digital picture is flawless, and with choice of scene-selection, upcoming previews, and bilingual format, it's absurdly reasonable for $24.99. To be honest, I couldn't care less about the options, though. I haven't seen anything with this much self-assuredness and visual flair since the original *Bubblegum Crisis*. That's high compliment. *Cowboy Bebop* has some of the most original characters and episodic stories around. It's art out of time, man. **GR**

MONSTER RANCHER VOL. 1

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA ALEXANDER
•2000 ADV FILMS
75 MINUTES•ENGLISH DUBBED
★★★ *ACTION/ADVENTURE*

To tell the truth, when I first put the tape in the VCR I was skeptical. Yeah this must be another amazingly blatant Poké-rip-off. But after the first five minutes I realized that this wasn't nearly as painful to watch as *Pokémon*. In fact it was kinda fun. The main character's name is Genki (means healthy or energetic in Japanese). Genki is the Ash of *Monster Rancher*, but he's much less annoying than Ash. Genki is a normal boy in a normal life who dreams of going to the make-believe worlds in his game Monster Battle. He spends his time daydreaming about his favorite game. Then one day his dream strangely comes true as he is sucked into the world of Monster Battle. The story is basically "The Neverending Story" retold for the new millennium of elementary school kids. Frankly, this anime blows the *Pokémon* anime away in every aspect. It has better animation, storylines that are simplistic, but not as mind-numbing as *Pokémon*, and characters that are much less annoying. So yes, this does seem to be another Poké-rip riding the coat-tails of Pokémon, but Monster Rancher just does it better than the original. If I were a grade school kid, I'd be all over this anime. **GR**

BLUE SUBMARINE No. 6

REVIEWED BY DAVE HALVERSON
•1999 BANDAI
30 MINUTES•BILINGUAL DVD
★★★★★ *ACTION/DRAMA*

Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, along comes *Blue Submarine* on DVD, the ultimate marriage of CGI and traditional animation. As the first episode opens with the camera panning through the clouds, your gaze shifts from the vast blue ocean to the submarine and its crew about to submerge, and you know that you're in for something extraordinary. On DVD, *Blue Sub*'s clarity is uncanny, visibly boosting an already magnificent visual treat to illegally gorgeous status. Episode 1, "Hearts," sets the stage for what lies ahead. Kino, a spirited (and cute) young female Blue Submarine cadet, comes ashore—or what's left of it—to try and coax ace pilot Hiyami, who's enjoying a heroin binge and working as a salvage diver to rejoin the cause. The world, now almost completely submerged, is being systematically taken over by Zorndyke, a brilliant scientist turned genocidal maniac bent on the extinction of mankind. Together with his assorted mutations and a serious war machine, *Blue Submarine No. 6* is about all that stands between him and his insane goal. One scene in particular in which Hiyami saves one of the females of the new species from suffocating after he immobilizes her vessel is one of the most captivating animated moments ever. Each 30-minute episode will set you back $20, but it's $20 well spent. **GR**

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Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040 Vol.5 Heartbreaker

"Live for the moment and lap it up."
-Manga Max

A raging boomer demands instant response from the Knight Sabers, but only one shows up. With Lina out of town and Nene trapped at AD Police headquarters, Priss stands alone in the flaming ruins of the Ministry of Defense. The military's most closely guarded secret has become a worst case scenario exceeding all projections.

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A Masterpiece of Spine-Ripping Horror!

What could possibly be weirder than time-traveling, space-jumping, intergalactic TROLLS? How about finding out that you're actually one of them. That's what happens in just the first few minutes of Go Nagai's *Star Demon*!

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Police Branch 82

Warning! Arresting Content.

In the lurid glow of cheap hotel neon, a pair of hardboiled detectives are on the trail of a stolen statue. Only this heist isn't a one-man job, and the cops in question sport short skirts and shoulder holsters. Taking the maxim of the magnum, Mika and Rin shoot first and ask questions later in *Police Branch 82*!

In stores 05.23.00
DUB $19.98

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GR SYNTHETICS

TOY FAIR 2000

BY NICK LANIER

When the clock turned to the year 2000 this January my computer froze, I lost all my money through an ATM Y2K malfunction, and the electricity in my house shut off. So I don't have a clue why everyone is so damn happy this year. The only thing I have to look forward to is some great toys. Yes, I'm a lonely man who can't remember my last name, but I do love toys. So GR sent me to New York to speak with Hilary Clinton on why she wants to run for office in the great big red apple. But I went to Toy Fair instead. Here's my report.

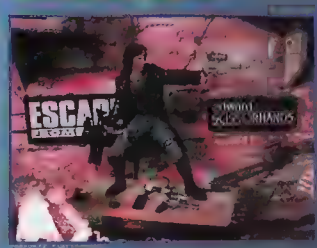
The year turns to 2000 and the toy industry seizes the opportunity to take a great leap into the future with technology-based toys ruling over this year's Toy Fair. If there was a place to install a microchip into the sculpted pieces of plastic that we love so much, it wasn't missed. And if the toy doesn't talk, it might as well because the attention to detail being paid in the sculpting process of action figures has turned out some of the most intricate products yet seen. And speaking of amazing sculpts, let's begin this year's tour of The American International Toy Fair with...

McFarlane Toys

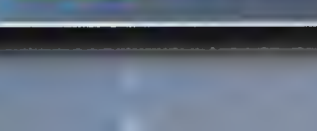
McFarlane is spreading his net far, wide, and fairly obscure. For instance, tell me your favorite line from *Slap Shot*? Slap what? Thought so. It's really a very funny film about hockey starring Paul Newman. But this film is pushing 30 years old, kids. At any rate, the figures are true to the slap-happy hockey spirit of the film. Strange Brew, anybody? McFarlane is giving us amazing sculpts of Bob and Doug McKenzie.

Moving from the obscure to the great prize of all anime fans....yes, yes... McFarlane is calling this lineup 3D Animation From Japan. Figures include Kaneda and Tetsuo from Akira, Ryoko from Tenchi Muyo, and Vash the Stampede from Trigun. The prototypes that were on display make you wish these had already hit the stores, but you'll have to wait until November to get these babies.

In the town where I was born...Ah! A second line of Beatles, Yellow Submarine figures are on their way. New sculpts of John, Paul, Ringo, and George along with many of the psychedelic Yellow Submarine creatures including Apple Bonker, Blue Meanie, Bull Dog, Lord Mayor, Snapping Turtle Turk, and Vacuum Monster will soon be coming to a toy shelf near you.



Did somebody ask Where The Wild Things Are? McFarlane brings us an impressive series of six figures from Maurice Sendak's classic children's book. Figures include Aaron, Bernard, Emil, Max and the Goat Boy, Moishe, and Tzippy.



The population of South Park is also in McFarlane's 2000 line-up. Figures include Big Gay Al, Cartman, Chef, Cow, Ike, Kenny, Kyle, Mr. Garrison, Mr. Hanky the Christmas Poo, Officer Barbrady, School Nurse, Stan, Starvin Marvin, Terrance and Phillip, Turkey, and Wendy. There are still some licensing issues so some of these might not reach the shelves. Keep your fingers crossed.

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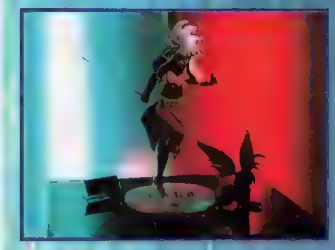
The latest series of Movie Maniacs includes Ash (*Evil Dead*), Edward Scissorhands, King Kong (big and boxed), Snake Plissken (*Escape From New York*), and The Fly, along with Blair and Norris monsters from *The Thing*.

'60s and '70s rock legends are being immortalized in plastic. For starters, Janis Joplin, Alice Cooper, and Rob Zombie. Drug overdose anybody?

New figures from the Austin Powers line include Carnaby Street Austin, Dr. Evil, Mini Me, Scott Evil, Vanessa Kensington, Fembot, and Fat Bastard, plus 9" Austin Powers, Fat Bastard (again) and Dr. Evil, and a Dr. Evil/Mini Me 2-pack (see previous page). Groovy, baby!



Spawn 16: Nitro Riders. Spawn and the art of motorcycle repair maintenance. The four figures in this series are After Burner, Eclipse 5000, Flash Point, and Green Vapor. Figure and motorcycle are included in each set.

Spawn 17 is a series of classic Spawn characters, only resculpted a hundredfold over the earlier figures. Coming are new versions of Al Simmons, Clown, Malebolgia, Medieval Spawn, Spawn, and Tiffany.

Spawn 18: Interlink 6 blows everything else at Toy Fair off the shelves. It's a series of six robots that connect together to build one giant 26" Spawn-stomping machine. HD1, LA6, LL4, RA5, RL3, and TS2 are the individual machines that make up this colossus.

N2Toys

N2Toys is a little-known company, but that will soon be changed. With new figures coming from *The Matrix*, *Heavy Metal 2000*, *Road Warrior*, *Red Planet*, and *Babylon 5*, they will be making their mark on the action-figure map in short time.

New figures from *The Matrix* include 12" versions of Neo and Trinity; Anderson, Trinity, and Tank "Space Frame" figures; Neo being rescued from his battery state; Sentinel; Neo vs. Agent Smith [illegible] and a cold cast porcelain statue of floating Trinity. Amazing sculpts on all of these.

[illegible] is *Heavy Metal 2000* (formerly *Heavy Metal: Fakk 2*). Or maybe it'll be called Lassie: On the Run. I mean, they could change the whole damn plot around on us and do something freaky like that. Things like that happen in Hollywood. Figures in this assortment are Julie, Tyler, Sawyer Noggin, and Dr. E. Chiona. N2Toys will also be releasing a cold cast porcelain of Julie. And maybe Lassie with real licking action. Can you imagine that!

Mission to Mars has already hit the big screen, but *Red Planet*, starring Val Kilmer and Carrie Ann Moss (*The Matrix*) will be blowing in for the fall. Figures include Navy Lt. Commander Kate Bowman, Chief Science Officer Chantilas, Dr. Quinn Burchenal, Chief Engineer Robby Gallagher, and 12" versions of Bowman and Gallagher.

Showing off how well they know action figure collectors, N2Toys managed to nab The Road Warrior license. The series includes Max (and he's Mad) and Humungus, plus four others from this seminal post-nuclear film.

Aztech Toys

A new company with a lot of pizazz is Aztech Toys. This combined effort on the part of Aztech and the Art Asylum includes Graf Orlok (left) and Knock Renfield from the film *Nosferatu* (1922) and Dr. Caligari and Cesare the Sleepwalker from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). You will be hearing much more about this company in the near future. Headed by frontman Digger, of The Art Asylum, Aztech has the talent and guts to push the envelope of the toy industry to new heights (and depths).

P.S. A Silent Screamers video game may be in the works.

P.P.S. *Silent Scream* is a little-known slasher film from the early 80s.

P.P.P.S. Silent screaming is very disturbing, if you've ever seen anyone doing it. It usually happens at raves.

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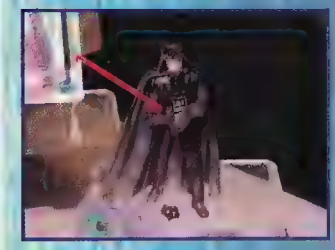

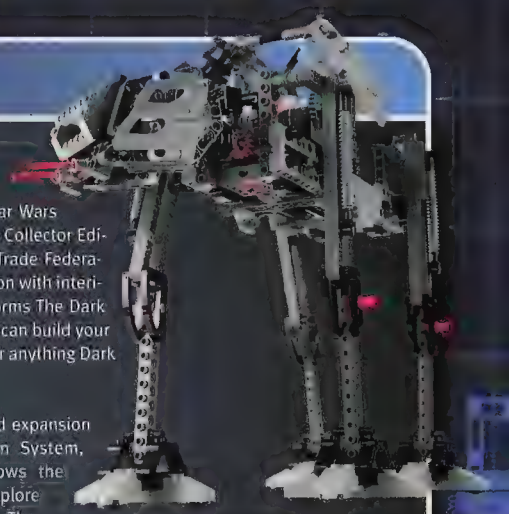

Lego

Lego continues to rock the building block world with new Star Wars playsets on their way. Sets include Collector Edition TIE Interceptor and X-Wing, Trade Federation MTT and ATT, Millennium Falcon with interior playset area, and from Mindstorms The Dark Side Developer Kit with which you can build your own computerized AT-AT, robots, or anything Dark Side related.

Also coming from Lego is the third expansion pack for the Robotics Invention System, Exploration Mars. This set allows the builder of the planetary rover to explore Mars with the help of their PC. The software is based on nearly 40 years worth of information gathered about the red planet. It's a crash course in Martian history for young and old.

Also from Mindstorms is the ultimate accessory kit to allow builders to create even more powerful machines. Set includes two sensors, extra parts, a Lego lamp, and a remote control.

Hasbro Star Wars

Over at Hasbro, Star Wars was, well, interesting. Yes, there is a new packaging scheme and, yes, there is that dream montage Vader with Luke's Head...but overall the really cool products coming your way weren't even shown nor can be mentioned here. But it's safe to say there are some amazing things on their way.

New figures from *Episode One* include, but are not limited to: Anakin (Mechanic), Boss Nass (Naboo Temple), Fode and Beed, Gungan Warrior, Jar Jar Binks (Naboo), Obi Wan Kenobi (Jedi Cloak), Pit Droids (two-pack), Qui-Gon Jinn (Tatooine), R2-D2 (Battle Damaged), Sebulba, Senate Guard, and Tusken Raider. Hasbro is definitely into making the same character many times over (i.e. Jar Jar, Qui Gon, Obi-Wan...).

On the classic side of 4" things, we will be seeing Chewbacca with chess game, a new Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jek Porkins, and Dagobah Spirit Darth Vader.

Some new and happy Episode One 12 inch figures are coming including electronic C-3PO, Battle Droid Commander, Mace Windu (Yay!), Qui-Gon Jinn (Tatooine), Anakin (Pilot), Boss Nass, and Sebulba with Chubas. Most excellent.

Hasbro also seems to be repackaging most of the figures that were released since the first wave of Flash Back Photos on new blister cards that combine Episode One with Classic Star Wars. All of these will be issued with comtech chips. Go figure.

Palisades Marketing

Video games anybody? Palisades Marketing blasts off of the game screen into the toy world with new figures from Resident Evil 3, House of the Dead 2, Final Fantasy, and Soul Calibur, to name a few. Yep, they're just blasting off all sorts of places. Watch 'em blast. See that?

A new line of vinyl figures includes Jill and Nemesis from Resident Evil 3. Nemesis scaled nice and big compared to our zombie-killing heroine. Two highly detailed zombies from House of the Dead 2 are also coming from this line.

Also coming from Palisades are figures from Front Mission 3, Mortal Kombat, and Tekken 3. I've played with some of the Front Mission figures and can tell you first hand, they're a blast.

Toy Site

It's a Donkey Kong, Zelda, and Mario World from Toy Site. A new wave of Zelda figures includes Young Link, Ganondorf with horse, Zelda, and Darunia. Mario World expands from action figures to a line of plush figures with all main characters included. Donkey Kong also expands into the world of plush with a new wave of action figures to boot. Notice how Toy Site expands, as opposed to blasting? It's a fine distinction and worth noting.

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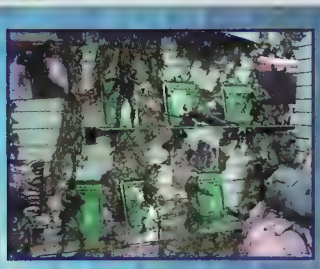
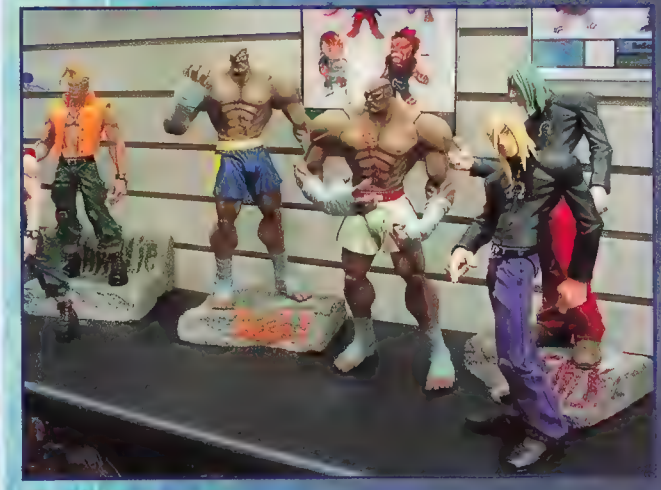




Resaurus

Resaurus continues its tradition of video game action figure excellence. Street Fighter 3 is on its way for Dreamcast and Resaurus' line of Street Fighter Round 2 figures will be out about the same time. Akuma, Chun-Li, Necro, Charlie, Remy, and Sagat will be available in two different paint variations each.

And let's not forget the Street Fighter Jr. collection. These are little versions of some of the big fighters. Included are Sakura, Blanka, Guile, and Cammy.

Sonic Adventure has a second wave of figures due and a sequel for the Dreamcast coming in December of this year. Sonic with Skis, Big the Cat, Amy, and E-102 make up the assortment. Also a Toys 'R' Us exclusive, 11" electronic Sonic the Hedgehog is shipping now. It talks and has sound effects from the game.

From the hit game Gex comes...Gex. Figure 2-packs include Secret Agent Gex and Rex, Skeleton Pirate, Count Gexula and Paunch, Extreme Gex with Penguin, and Moo Shoo Pork. Each figure comes with opening television set and fly figure along with other accessories. Look for these figures about the time that Gex 3 hits the stores.

Resaurus' 6" military line Special Forces lands this June with SEAL Fire Team, SEAL CQB, SEAL Combat Diver, Green Beret Recon, Green Beret Sniper, and Green Beret Advisor. Of all the military lines out there, this one takes the cake. Each figure has interchangable heads, 17 points of articulation, and amazing authentic weapons and accessories. But no, trained seal figure is not coming as part of the assortment.

Toy Vault

Toy Vault, known for their Lord of the Rings action figures, will be coming out with a line of toys based on the PC Game EverQuest. The first two figures will be a dwarf and Iksar with more to follow.

Bandai

Digimon craziness. Being introduced into the 2 1/2" figure assortment are all eight of the kids from the *Digimon* animated series.

Gundam is a new video game for PlayStation and a new line of figures from Bandai. Assortment includes Altron and Deathscythe Hell, Gundam Zero, Gundam Epyon, Mercurius, Shenlong Gundam, Gundam Zero, and Vayeate. These figures have been test marketed in Southern California and due to the overwhelming response, will be making their way to the rest of civilization.

X-Toys

X-Toys and Dragon (of Japan) have teamed up to release a line of amazing 12" figures. Included are Detective Chow, Jackie Chan, NYPD Police SWAT, SEAL Team Six, Sniper, and U.S. Marshal. Note this scene from the showroom as they team up to arrest Barbie and friend.

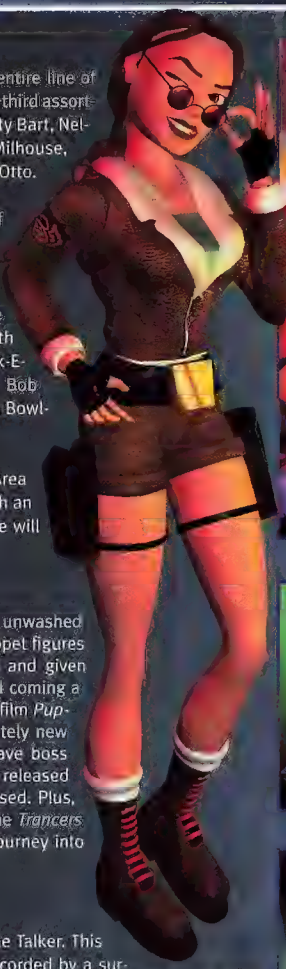
X-Toys is also bringing us figures from NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. The first series is Goat Boy, Mary Katherine Gallagher, Nat X, and John Belushi as the Samurai Baker. These figures will be six inches tall with more waves out by the end of the year.

Playmates

On display at the Playmates showroom was the entire line of action figures from *The Simpsons*. The second and third assortments will be made up of Moe, Barney, Kamp Krusty Bart, Nelson, Ned Flanders, Chief Wiggum, Smithers, Milhouse, Lenny, Ralph Wiggum, Groundskeeper Willie, and Otto.

Also coming from the Simpsons line is a series of electronic playsets, or World of Springfield Environments. The sets include microchip technology that allow the figures to communicate with each other. Now available are Marge and Maggie with Living Room, and Radioactive Homer with Power Plant. Next waves will include Apu with Kwik-E-Mart, Principal Skinner with School, Sideshow Bob with Springfield TV Studio, and Pin Pal Homer with Bowl-A-Rama.

From Playmates' Tomb Raider lineup, we'll see an Area 51 playset, three sets with Lara including one with an alligator, a cheetah, and a doberman, and ToyFare will have an exclusive Lara in Bomber Jacket figure.



Simpsons Figures

Macross Plus

Full Moon Toys

Full Moon Toys is taking a leap into the great unwashed masses. Mass market, that is. The original six puppet figures which sold incredibly well have been repainted and given some new accessories/spiffy new packaging. And coming a few months later is a line of figures from the new film *Puppet Master Vs. Demonic Toys*. These are completely new sculpts that tower over the older figures and have boss articulation and cybernetic enhancements. To be released in single and box set form when the film is released. Plus, adding to Full Moon's 12" line, Jack Deth from the *Trancers* movies will soon be making a midnight special journey into your collection.

Hasbro

From Hasbro's G.I. Joe line comes the Navajo Code Talker. This 12" figure features electronic speech that was recorded by a surviving Navajo Code Talker who served during WWII. It comes decked out with accessories, weapons, and seven phrases in English and Navajo. And by the way, a neat JFK 12" Joe is coming this summer. I tried to shoot the figure from a grassy knoll but was apprehended by John Travolta.

ToyCom

Toycom will be releasing new toys from a line entitled Macross Plus. Yes, these are from that '80s Japanese animated series. Bandai used to own the license; now it's ToyCom. The first two planes will be YF-19 Alpha and YF-21 Omega, soon to be followed by VF-11 Thunderbolt. Sculpted at 1/72 scale, they will begin arriving in stores in May. And you just can't wait.

Mattel

Mattel's latest entry into the booming 12" action figure fray is Max Steel. Late in '99, reports flew that low and stealthy Mattel was going to re-introduce the Big Jim line of a-little-less-than 12" figures into the market. Those rumors proved false, but not by much. This new millennium's answer to Big Jim is by turns just as prone to action and adventure and carries a decidedly futuristic spin, what with cybernetic body parts and Action Man-like vehicles. To date the line has sold very well for an ailing Mattel, who truly needs a big hit in the boys category. Coming soon for Max Steel fans is a very special Dreamcast game.

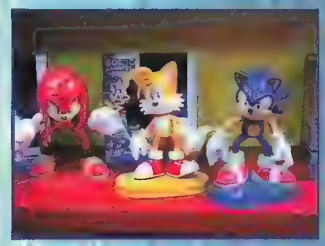
Still within the orbit of Mattel is Disney's newest CGI entry, *Dinosaur*. Mixing live-action environments with cutting-edge computer wizardry, Dinosaur is set to bring new depth and emotion to the world of computer-graphic film making. We will see. In the meantime Mattel has snagged the action figure/role playing rights to the film, and by far the most impressive product from the line was the dinosaur that hatched from its own egg. The hatchling is interactive and has a "buried" form of intelligence that can be coaxed out of it through interaction. Then when you're done playing with it, just insult it and it crawls back into its shell.

Manley Toy Quest

Are your kids bugging you to get a dog and you just don't think you have the time and energy to housebreak it? Never fear. Manley Toy Quest brings Tekno the Robotic Puppy to a living room near you. He does many things a real dog does, but without the bother and without the mess. Significantly less expensive than Sony's Aibo, this little guy will fetch, bark, and guard your house. Without the fleas.

Equity Marketing

It's unbelievable, but after 30-plus years of Scooby Doo, there is finally a Mystery Machine playset! It's from Equity Marketing and it's so cool. Comes with three figures: Shaggy, Fred, and Scooby. It's unbelievable, but I, too, am almost 30 years old. Such a mystery.



Toy Island

It seems Resaurus isn't the only company that can get into the Hedgehog business. That's right. Toy Island, best remembered for its super-deluxe 15" Robocop figure, is poised to release all forms of Sonic goodness. This includes, but is not limited to, action figures of not just Sonic, Knuckles, and Tails, but the Eggman himself. Now where is the Walrus? Also coming is a line of plush, bendables, and a real hedgehog in a box.

Trendmasters

From the company that brought us Godzilla toys comes something much more frightening: John Travolta in dreadlocks. God, how long has it been since *Saturday Night Fever*? Oh well... Our rasta-like villain (yes, Johnny is a villain in this film) comes to Earth and, well, tries to take it over. He brings with him a veritable hoard of big, loud, grey spaceships. Guess what? You can buy these spaceships come summer when the titular film is released. Along for the ride is a deluxe 12" talking version of Travolta, numerous action figures, complete with miniature diorama bases—perfect for reenacting key moments from the L. Ron Hubbard epic. Hmmm...

Gallery of the best of the rest

So much more was at this show, I can scarcely describe it. Besides, I think I've said about enough. I'll just let the pictures do the talking from here.

As you can see, there was simply too much to see that could fit into a magazine that isn't only about toys. Hmmm... "Toyers' Republic." No, we better stick with the games. We hope you liked this glimpse at what's coming up for 2000, and we promise to keep bringing you all the hottest toys every month!

• Glasstron

Sony • www.sony.com • Retail: $499.95

Desirability: ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Face-mounted displays like Sony's Glasstron have a ways to go in resolution and comfort before one could actually enjoy a full-length feature film wearing them, but for quick bursts of high-action gaming, they provide a nicely enhanced sensory experience. Simulating a 52" screen viewed from six feet away, the twin, 160,000 pixel LCDs driving the Glasstron provide suitable image quality for video games. Unfortunately, LCD technology does not allow for true blacks or much contrast in the image, so everything looks a little washed out. But play a game like Wipeout 3 or Ridge Racer V in first-person view, and the gimmick of the Glasstron actually pays off, providing a highly involving, eye-filling spectacle. Just keep in mind that the slightly expensive Glasstron is a horribly solitary device, and you don't want to be in the same room with someone who's using one. Unless, of course, you want to be extremely bored.

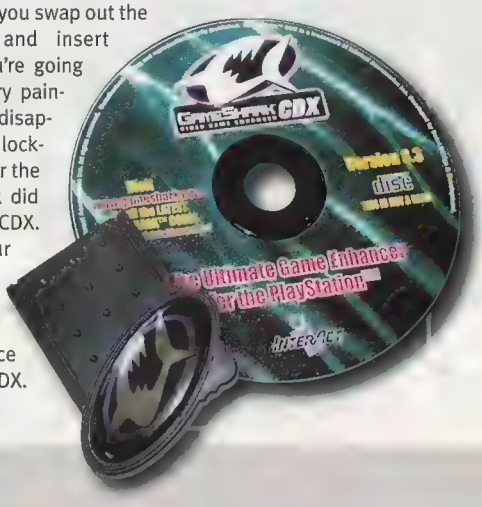
• Game Shark CDX

Interact • www.interact-acc.com • Retail: $49.99

Desirability: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sony's newest model of PlayStation 1, the SCPH-9000, has lost the parallel I/O port, found on every previous incarnation of the system, leaving InterAct high and dry with their original GameShark. Not so easily defeated, they've fought back with the GameShark CDX, allowing new PlayStation owners the opportunity to "enhance" their favorite games with codes galore.

Using the CDX is very simple. Insert the supplied memory card and boot the system using the CDX disc. After selecting one of the hundreds of pre-supplied codes or inputting your own manually, you swap out the GameShark disc and insert whatever game you're going to alter. It's all very painless, though I was disappointed that import lockout codes written for the original GameShark did not work with the CDX. If codes are your thing and you own the latest model PlayStation, you have no choice but to pick up the CDX.



GR GEAR

• Viper>PSX

Nyko • www.nyko.com • Retail: $19.99

Desirability: ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Nyko's new PlayStation Dual Shock pad, the Viper>PSX fares a lot better than the Dream>Master, being comfortable in the hand and offering a pleasing ergonomic layout. Even the plastics are of decent quality, something that's ludicrously rare in most third party pads. The analog sticks are smooth and free of binding or rough spots, but I would prefer a little more tension in their movement. Even with its useless turbo mode, this is certainly one of the better third party PS pads I've used.

• Dream>Master

Nyko • www.nyko.com • Retail: $19.99

Desirability: ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

This is not a good replacement for the Dreamcast pad, lower cost or not. The D-pad is too small, the analog stick too limited in its movement, and the ill-placed triggers emit the cheapest of scraping sounds as you squeeze them. And like a lot of third-party pads, it has features that you'll never use, like turbo fire and slow motion (what modern games need this?) and two extra buttons, which just seem to get in the way. If you need another Dreamcast pad, spend a couple of extra bucks and buy a real one.

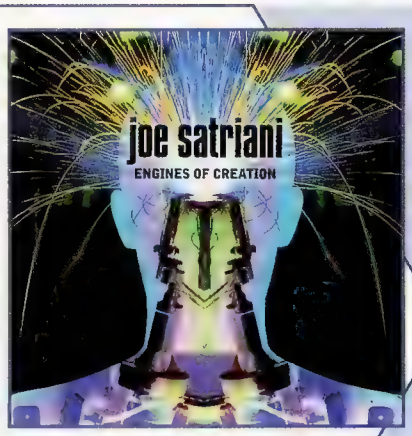
Fundamental—which has the same meaning in both Spanish and English—has 13 sizzling tracks that cover the wide range of lyrical and musical influences the band members grew up with. The album's title track, which also happens to be "Fundamental," is juiced by a swinging Afro-Cuban pulse that breaks into a metallic frenzy, prompting Sergio to switch from smooth Spanish to abrasive English. Oasis, one of the CD's more hyperkinetic cuts, is a tribute to the island's unique cultural mix, and the band's eternal love for its homeland.

Crooning over a funky Latin jazz vibe, Sergio switches it up to suddenly growl over Ramon's revved-up thrash guitars, shouting "This is where the sound of the future is born!" in Spanish. The track "Trinidad" celebrates the Puerto Rican welterweight boxing champ of the same name, and "Whatever" is a slinky hard rock/Latin funk song about a day when everything that can go wrong, does. The album is such a hybrid, it's hard to categorize it.

The production on the album is great and the guitar arrangement is crafted nicely. ***Tom Stratton***

Puya-Fundamental
MCA/Universal, Domestic

B



Joe Satriani proves clearly on his latest endeavor—a brand new shiny quiver of shred-tastic voiceless compositions—that you can adhere to the basic formula that made you king and change with the times, all without selling your fans short. My greatest fear, as a long-time Satriani fan (as it is with all the purists like VAST, Rush, and Steve Vai, all audio gods in my book) is that sooner or later he'll take at a stab at the mainstream. Gratefully Joe has not, taking the high road once again. There's no cliché rap track on this CD nor any Latino pop fusion. "Engines of Creation" does not endeavor to break new ground or cash in, but to make the foundation already laid even stronger. Mixing subtle elements of electronica here and pulsing drum accompaniment there, *Creation* covers the gamut, from fluid songs of driving bliss to slow methodical instrumental dances. Joe Satriani is a man on a mission to deliver music that creates moments. "The Power Cosmic 2000-Part II" is an especially diverse track sashaying from Yes-like trance mode to electronica to a little jungle, within the span of 4 1/2 minutes. A truly inspired effort. ***Dave Halverson***

Joe Satriani Engines of Creation
EPIC, Domestic

A-

Let me start by saying that Videodrone is to Korn what Godsmack is to Metallica, which by no means is a bad thing. In both cases, however, I've had people come into my office saying, "I didn't know Korn (or Metallica, as the case may be) had a new album out." Again, this isn't a bad thing, as imitation can be the sincerest form of flattery. Also, for hard-core fans of the musical style, you can never get too much of a good thing, and this disk has more than a few good things going on. My only beef as a closet (or office) musician is that the album doesn't really break new ground or test any boundaries of the genre, which is what I often look for in a new disk. That being said, this particular new disk is in my current CD rotation, and if you're a fan of the metal/rap sound with a touch of electronica, you'd be well served to check these guys out. ***Edd Fear***

Videodrone
Reprise, Domestic

B-

Gamers' Re[public] Music Reviews

Audiophiles

What GR is listening to this month

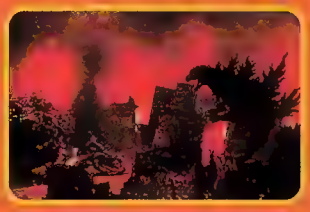
D Halverson	G Fiechter	M Hobbs	T Stratton	Pooch
1. MARILYN MANSON *mechanical animals*	1. VERTICAL HORIZON *anything you want*	1. APHEX TWIN *selected ambient works II*	1. SARAH McLACHLAN *touch*	1. TUPAC *greatest hits*
2. KORN *issues*	2. CARTER BURWELL *being john malcovich*	2. U-ZIQ *royal astronomy*	2. GARBAGE *version 2.0*	2. DJ SPUN *SanFranSicko*
3. JOE SATRIANI *engines of creation*	3. MOBY *play*	3. PET SHOP BOYS *nightlife*	3. JANET JACKSON *velvet rope*	3. PINK FLOYD *wish you were here*
4. RIDGE RACER V *soundtrack*	4. JOHN WILLIAMS *angela's ashes*	4. LAURIE ANDERSON *bright red*	4. BRANDY *never say never*	4. HANDSOME BOY M. S. *how's your girl?*
5. 311 *sound system*	5. PAUL SCHWARTZ *aria 2: new horizon*	5. HANDEL *watermusic*	5. VERUCA SALT *eight arms to hold you*	5. BONE THUGS N HARMONY *the art of war*

J.R. Haugen	S Akinnuso	E Fear	G Elmquist	G Abraham
1. BECK *midnite vultures*	1. MOS DEF *black on both sides*	1. JOE SATRIANI *crystal planet*	1. DR DRE *chronic 2000*	1. VARIOUS *transmission to andromeda*
2. BOOGIE NIGHTS *soundtrack vol I & II*	2. BEN HARPER *burn to shine*	2. PUYA *fundamental*	2. GUANO APES *proud like a god*	2. TOASTED *100% pure rage jungle*
3. DOORS *greatest hits*	3. VARIOUS ARTISTS *lyricists lounge vol. 1*	3. DAVID SYLVIAN *brilliant trees*	3. TESTAMENT *gatherings*	3. SCARAMANGA *seven eyes, seven horns*
4. LED ZEPPELIN *houses of the holy*	4. EYES WIDE SHUT *soundtrack*	4. JOE SATRIANI *engines of creation*	4. VARIOUS ARTISTS *working man: rush tribute*	4. CHEMICAL BROTHERS *surrender*
5. THE APPLE *soundtrack*	5. ADAM SANDLER *what the hell...?*	5. FIRESIDE *do not tailgate*	5. MARTY FRIEDMAN *introductions*	5. MASSIVE ATTACK *protection*

GODZILLA 2000: MILLENNIUM — PREVIEW

TOHO/COLUMBIA TRISTAR (www.godzilla.co.jp)
JAPANESE • U.S. THEATRICAL RELEASE AUGUST 11, 2000
RATING TO BE DETERMINED
PREVIEWED BY EDD FEAR

I saw my first Godzilla movie in third grade (*Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla*—the 1974 release) while living in Alabama, and I was struck then by how foreign everything was: the people, the settings, the language, and the big rubber monsters. I was also struck by just how cool it was back then, and the U.S. attempt at cleaning up the look and feel of the big guy in 1998 for a domestic release couldn't displace those early childhood impressions.



Toho, the studio responsible for the original Japanese movies, released last year a modern Godzilla movie that seeks to combine the '90s cutting-edge CG with the '50s cutting-edge Japanese-actor-in-a-rubber-suit-on-a-sound-stage-with-a-miniature-city effects, opting not for the totally slick Hollywood-style monster but the Godzilla we've known and loved all these years. This time out, Godzilla's up to his old tricks, arising from the sea to destroy Japan. At the same time, an alien presence awakens from a 6000-year sleep and, in the form of a floating rock, causes much commotion. When the two clash, Godzilla is critically injured, but the rock is exposed to be a UFO. Classic Godzilla material.

What will be most interesting, however, is the U. S. theatrical release this summer. While we still don't have confirmation of whether this will be dubbed or subtitled (I'd be very surprised if Sony expected that Americans would be willing to read anything more than the opening credits), they have confirmed that this will come to theaters and not be an American direct-to-VHS product as first surmised.

GR is looking forward to this bold endeavor by Toho; no disrespect meant to the team responsible for *Godzilla: The Movie*, but we believe this may well be the movie that the third grader in all of us has been waiting for. **GR**

THE NINJA DRAGON — C+

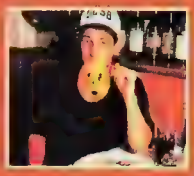
ASIA PULP CINEMA (www.asiapulpcinema.com)
IMPORT (1990) • VHS
UNRATED (contains violence)
REVIEWED BY EDD FEAR

Would you like to watch a Japanese mafia movie, a supernatural samurai movie, or a rubber-suited monster movie? Well, get all three in *The Ninja Dragon*; just don't expect it to be the best of all three. We follow the story of Hattai Suzuka, daughter of the Yakuza mafia boss (crime and lots of guns!) who is guarded by three mystical ninjas summoned by a magical dragon-shaped bell pendant. The ninjas have been sworn to protect the Suzuka bloodline for the past 1000 years (martial arts action!). When all the crime bosses of the region are killed by a mysterious new boss, the ninjas spring into action, tracking him to his fortress, where his henchmen bleed greenish-blue blood and sprout tentacles and second heads (in rubber-suited glory). And did I mention the female wrestling scene (appropriate since pro wrestler Cutie Suzuki also stars!)?

Also starring Kenji Otsuki in the dual role of the lead ninja and Hattai's bumbling driver, *The Ninja Dragon* is directed by Go Nagai, the genius behind such notable anime as *Cutey Honey* and *Devilman*. This pseudo-comedic romp that touches on so many things Japanese is a good time, just not too filling. **GR**

THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

CAN I BE A ROADIE?: More live-action flicks based on cartoon shows are in the works, the latest being *Josie and the Pussycats*. Rachael Leigh Cook, as Josie, is reportedly being joined by pussycats Tara Reid, Julia Stiles, and TLC members Left Eye and T-Boz. Any chance they're looking for a sound guy on the road? I got my own cables... • GREATEST AMERICAN ZERO: Adam Sandler as the Great American Hero? Actually, it makes more sense than the TV show ever did... • ROCKIN' THE MUMMY: WWF sensation The Rock is slated to appear in the sequel to *The Mummy*. Zoiks, Scoob, I never saw *that* coming... • BUT WILL IT BE CLAYMATION WITH A DANNY ELFMAN SOUNDTRACK?: It looks likely that Tim Burton will be directing a remake of *The Planet of the Apes* later this year. Given his treatment of other classic licenses (mostly *Batman*), we can't wait! • IT'S NOT REALLY LEATHER, YOU KNOW: A prequel to the horror classic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is in the works, directed by Martin Kunert, who brought us *Campfire Tales*. Come on, surely we weren't the only ones who saw that...



Vigilante 8: Second Offense

All of the following codes need to be entered in at the Password Screen. To access the Password Screen, from the Main Menu, select the Options option, then select the Game Status option and press down on the joystick to highlight one of the characters, then press the top L & R buttons simultaneously. After entering each code, press A. If a code is entered correctly, you will hear "funky."

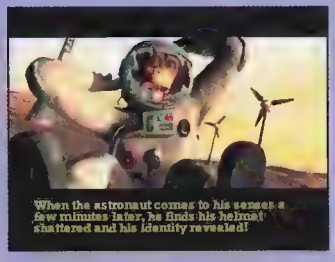
I Feel the Need for Speed
To make the cars faster, enter: **MORE_SPEED**

The Whole Gang's Here
To unlock all of the characters, enter: **LLA_KCOLNU**

Like Being on the Moon
To defy the law of gravity, enter: **NO_GRAVITY**

Big Ol' Rubbers
To get big tires, enter: **GO_MONSTER**

V8: SO the Movie
To be able to watch a cartoon of V8: SO, enter: **LONG_MOVIE.** Then highlight a character and press A.

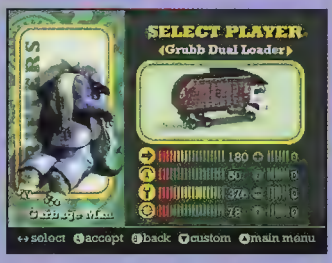


I Am Untouchable
To be invincible, enter: **ELBICNIVNI**

"Nice Car." "You Too."
To make the same car available to other players in multiplayer mode, enter: **MIXED_CARS**

Ultimate Battle Mode
To max out the stats of all the characters, enter: **LLA_DORTOH**

High Ridin'
To give the cars massive suspension, enter: **JACK_IT_UP**



Low Ridin'
To give the cars NO suspension at all, enter: **DRIVE_ONLY**

Rat-a-tat-tat
To remove the delay when shooting weapons, enter: **RAPID_FIRE**

Slow Motion Mode
Enter **GO_SLOW_MO** as a password.

Solo Play in Arcade Mode
Enter **HOME_ALONE** as a password.

Super Missiles
Enter **BLAST_FIRE** as a password to increase the damage from missiles.

Attract Enemies:
Enter **UNDER_FIRE** as a password to have three enemies to attack simultaneously.

Heavier Cars
Enter **GO_RAMMING** as a password to increase your car's weight and ramming ability.

Lighter Cars
Enter **HI_CEILING** as a password to decrease your car's weight and hover higher than normal.

Fast Action
Enter **QUICK_PLAY** as a password to enable a random arcade feature.

Ultra Rez Option
Note: This code requires the RAM expansion pak. Enter **GO_MAX_REZ** as a password.

Disable Codes
Enter **NO_CODE** as a password.

WWF WrestleMania 2000

Use Whatever You Can
To pick up a weapon to use in the ring, move your character to one of the crowd fences and press C-Up and the direction that the fence is in to grab a weapon from behind the fence. Go back into the ring and press the B button to use the weapon.

Don't Just Stand There!
The following code only works in the Exhibition Mode, Single Match game, which is for only two players. You need to have all four controllers connected into the N64 and need to choose characters that have managers or sidekicks. The manager/sidekick for player one is controlled by simultaneously pressing C-Up + C-Down + Z on the third controller and the manager/sidekick for player two is controlled the same way on the fourth controller.

Hey, That's My Move
The following will enable you to steal the finishing move of your opponent and use it on him. Get your opponent in a strong grapple when your Attitude Meter is flashing. While in the hold, press the analog stick in any direction while simultaneously pressing A + B.

Say What!?
The following will enable you to steal your opponent's taunts and use them against him/her. Move the analog stick to the left and right for one taunt, and up and down for another taunt.

That's Gotta Hurt
This (very cool) code will allow you to jam your opponent's head into the cage during a cage match. Get your opponent into a headlock and, while holding the A button, press C-Right. Enjoy.

Got Aspirin?
The following code to throw your opponent's head into the turnbuckle, or into the fence in front of the crowd, will work if you have the right angle. Get your opponent into a grapple with your back against the turnbuckle or the fence, then press C-Down.

Soul Fighter

Cheat Code Screen

Press Left + Y when the Soul Fighter logo appears on the screen. Then go to options and exit it. The next screen to appear will be the cheat code screen.

Enter the following on the cheat code screen to gain these cheats:

High Energy
ABXXYA

All Weapons
XAAYBB

Level 2
AABXYA

Level 3
XAYAAB

Level 4
YYBAXA

Level 5
BABXXY

Level 6
XAXBYY

Level 7
ABXBYB

Level 8
YBBAXY

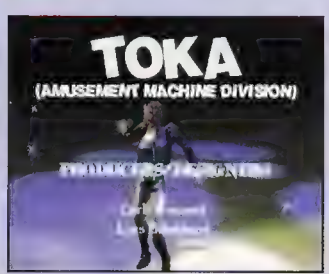
Level 9
BYAAXB

Level 10
XABBAX

Level 11
YBYXAB

Level 12
XBAXBY

View Credits
AAAAAA



Trick Style

For these codes, pause the game, select the "cheat" option, and enter the following as codes.

Unlock Everything
CITYBEACONS

Big Head Mode
INFLATEDEGO

All Stunts and Special Moves Unlocked
TRAVOLTA

Unlimited Time
IWISH

Always Win
TEABOUND

For the following codes, you need to just do the following:

In-Game Reset
Hold A + B + X + Y and press Start during game play.

Combat Board
Defeat the boss on the U.K. track.

Speed Board
Defeat the boss on the U.S. track.

Trick Board
Defeat the boss on the Japan track.

Fast Start
Tap R three times during the starting countdown, when the numbers 3, 2, and 1 appear. Then hold R when "Go" appears.

Dreams

Enter the following codes as your name to get the desired results.

All Cars
CARTOON

All Tracks
TRACTION

All Weapons
YOY

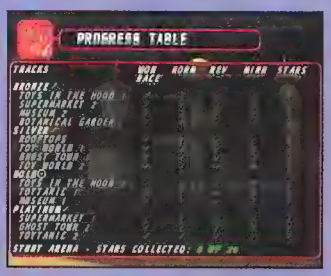
Tiny Mode
MAGGOT

Change Cars
CHANCER

Enable UFO
YUEFO

Hi-Fi Mode
FLYBOY

Edit Progress Table
GOATY



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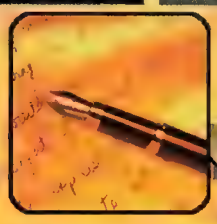

FALLOUT

Should you wish to put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard), please write to: **Fallout, Gamers' Republic, 32123 Lindero Canyon Road, Suite 215, Westlake Village, CA 91361 USA (editorial@gamersrepublic.com).**

Dear Gamers' Republic, readers of this magazine, and those who love electronic videogaming entertainment.

It has been brought to my attention that many, many people (especially those who think all games are the same) believe that violence in video games actually encourages people to act violent in real life. I've got just two words to say to you: "F@#% YOU!" This is total bull@#%. If Resident Evil and House of the Dead encourages us to shoot people's (or zombies', in this case) heads off, then will Bomberman encourage me to drop bombs on houses? Will Mario encourage me to become a plumber when I grow up? Will Harvest Moon encourage me to farm? Ninety percent will probably say "no," and the other ten are just jackasses who felt like being funny. So, what they are saying is, only violent games encourage gamers to act differently? Now, that's bullshit. A few days back, I heard about this book called "Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: a Call to Action Against TV, Movie, & Video Game Violence." It reads, and I quote: "...We have gone from the benign Pong in the 1970s to the 1990s that act more as murder simulators and permits youth to mimic the actual experience of killing." First, he mentioned a game of the 1970s, but not a 1990s game. Which means he does not know all that much about games. Second, he probably doesn't have kids; if he does, they probably don't play video games. I'm going to buy this book and prove he does not know a thing about games, but just felt like putting them down because he hates them. The advancing of games, I admit, will be more violent. Only to become more realistic and challenging. We play Half-Life or Quake 3, instead of Final Doom, not because of its realistic blood and gore, but because of its realistic AI. Honestly, who prefers Silent Hill over PONG? Me. Blood and gore only [add to] the realism, you can't have a God&*&% guy falling off the building without some blood. I hope this letter convinces more of you to believe that those game haters (who like to blame all the bad things done by teenagers on violent games) should just stick their thumb up their #%$! This letter is as serious as my letters can get, please print it on your magazine. Thank you, I also have three small questions:

1. What's the release date for PS2 in both Japan and North America?

2. Is the PocketStation ever coming out on our shores?

3. I recently visited www.ffonline.com, they had screenshots of FF 9, 10, & 11! Do you have any info on these games?

Willie "Zephyrgais" Ko

Willie,

Those who cannot see through the establishment's paper-thin posturing are either dim-witted or fooling themselves. Seriously, if anyone really thinks that a well-balanced individual can be unhinged by playing video games as opposed to the sheets of violence integrated throughout society and the world, well, I feel deeply sorry for them. I've learned to shrug off such nonsense because rising up against these dregs of society only fuels the fire.

Not to say that, say, a five-year old child playing a violent video game isn't going to be affected to some degree... he (or she) most certainly will be. The parent allowing him to do so is obviously the problem. Watched COPS lately? Well, most of those folks have kids—nuff said. But you knew that, as does anyone with a brain including the headline-grabbing shitheads who continue to spread this bile. Video games can also spark a child's imagination, sharpen their skills, and provide them the incentive to excel. (They also become one heck of a great career, as we can attest to first hand.) The promise of that next RARE game has provided excellent motivation for the kids I know. Bad grades, no game; good grades, Banjo-Tooie! But they don't talk about that. Hopefully the generation of so-called peers we are currently watching destroy all that is good will soon die off. Then we can perfect the anti-aging process and clean this mess up! Either that or the sooner I can go live in space the better! In response to your questions, the PS2 is out in Japan and hits here September; you don't want the PocketStation (it's not coming); and check our last issue for all the goods on Square 2000. Hey, thanks for the letter, but really don't let it keep you up at night... You have Sword of the Berserk-Gut's Rage to do that!

Dear GR,

I've been reading the news and reviews daily since the PS2 was released last week and it has me a little worried. Do you think that the next few months are going to be a rehash of the early days of the original PS where people will only see the graphics and look past the so-so gameplay? You probably remember more than a few covers/articles from early '95: "Toshinden best brawler ever." I'm sure there are a few magazines out there now that are going to start saying the Dreamcast is dead as soon as the PS2 is released in the U.S. I'm sure at least ___ will. I just don't want to see what happened to my beloved Saturn happen to my Dreamcast. I will buy a PS2 and I love my PS; there are countless great games on it. But I just hope maybe this time the gaming public will accept both systems. Wishful thinking, I know, but I just get so sick of going to gaming stores and hearing the little punk salesmen saying, "Don't buy a Dreamcast, Sega sucks, wait for the PlayStation 2." I guess I'm mainly trying to ask you if you think Sega's going to be able to hold out this time or now seeing the PS2 do you think the Dreamcast will fade out really quickly.

Zachry Jenkins

Zach,

I couldn't print the beginning of your letter but thanks, and I agree. As long as there are millions of units out there, of any console, and developers can sell over 100,000 units of a given title, the manufacturer will do just fine. It's only over when the users say it is, and you and I both know that as long as there are great games around, we're not going too say Jack. The bottom line is, and will always be, software. Like Miyamoto has said in every interview he's ever given, it's all about the games. Hell, there are already bad games for the PS2, as there are for the Dreamcast and have been for every other game console. All of the processing power in the world is worthless without the dedication, skill, creativity, marketing muscle, and cash it takes to make a game fly these days. I personally think Sega is going to have a great year and the Dreamcast, a great future. This year alone we're getting a new Sonic, Shenmue, Ecco, MDK 2, Eternal Arcadia, Phantasy Star Online, Grandia 2, Fur Fighters, Heavy Metal, Psycho Circus, Messiah, Floigan Bros., Soul Calibur 2, DOA 2, Rayman 2, Baldur's Gate, Half Life, Spawn, Castlevania Resurrection, Super Magnetic Neo, Berserk, Tomb Raider 4, Blue Stinger 2, Nightmare Creatures 2, Alone in the Dark, Code Veronica, and Maken X, not to mention a bunch we can't mention yet. It was different with the Saturn: it had crappy tools and just wasn't very good at 3D, yet Sega tried to push its 3D capabilities. As a 2D machine it would have continued the Genesis legacy magnificently and gone down as one of the industry's greatest enthusiast systems. Just look at Astal and tell me they didn't squander the opportunity. The Dreamcast, though, is easy to develop for, it's a great system, and the new Sega is a lot wiser. Of course, they still haven't produced a new Streets of Rage, or Shinobi, or Alex Kidd... should I go on? So, they still have a ways to go.

Dear GR,

I just got done reading the news bit about Mario Party and the serious health threat it poses to gamers. I'm just about to the point where I can't stand to watch the news because of our legal system. This outbreak of blisters doesn't even justify a response from Nintendo, but damned if they aren't dealing out $80 million worth of fingerless gloves to protect "Billy K-mart" from a discontinued game. In my youth, I can remember walking out of arcades with my hands aching, but not giving a damn about it because I had just smashed the world's records in Track & Field. I've played Street Fighter until my thumbs and forefingers were covered in blisters (open ones, at that). I've even suffered the horrors of a night of Mario Party (gasp) and had huge blisters in the center of my palms, but it didn't mortally wound or permanently disable me. In fact, I believe I was having too much fun with my friends to notice the blisters, other than the fact that they were mostly gone by the time I woke up the next morning.

The gamers of America have become a bunch of silky-boys (and girls)! It's time to restore the image of blisters as a badge of honor! They're not life-threatening, they show dedication! Anyone who owned a 3Do and a copy of Super Street Fighter II: Turbo will give me a wholehearted "yea" upon remembering how badly that d-pad gnawed at your thumb.

Anyway, I just wanted to bitch a little bit (it's what I do) and share my opinion on this nationwide epidemic.

Matthew Thompson

Matt,

The world has officially gone completely mad. I'm just waiting for news of the comets at this point.

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▸ BERSERK, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 63

uppercuts, an energy-draining but effective spin attack, block, and punch.

But the true power emerges once his temper bar fills red. For a limited time he becomes totally unhinged and as trails of red light radiate from his eyes, he whacks the shit out of everything in his path like a man possessed. On the gore scale, these moments of crimson carnage manage to reach new heights. Be sure to seek out and crack open every crate, jug, and barrel you come across, too. Guts can carry three items, one that heals and two that deal devastating blows, and when these bosses come calling, you need all of the extra firepower you can get. Oh, and one last thing: memorize your buttons before you play. You'll need to make some quick decisions along the way.

After three or four hours of blistering action and quality cinema, dealing the last lethal blow to one of the most memorable final bosses ever and then viewing a very fulfilling, bittersweet ending (make sure to sit through all of the credits), there's still more to come. Berserk has seven gifts waiting to be opened up, including a Puck mini-game, a gallery, and an in-depth look at the Berserk universe. And the game's soundtrack—A+. The bar for action and adventure has officially been raised. Berserk isn't timed, doesn't have unlimited continues, is never repetitious or boring, and is plenty long. It manages to not fall prey to one of this genre's many taboos. I applaud Yuke's for their best effort since Hermie Hopperhead, and Eidos for localizing it with care and celerity. As long as games like this are available for the Dreamcast, Sega has nothing to worry about. **GR**

▸ JEREMY MCGRATH, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 73

steering exercise/background turner. Pulling back over the whoops or in the straights produces no wheelie whatsoever, and any feeling of actual working suspension is nonexistent. Making matters worse, plowing into the sides of the course seldom produces a wipeout—soft collision abounds.

Back on the positive side, the game has plenty of realistic locales on tap (and they're well represented) and all the modes you could hope for, including a swell multiplayer venue and an easy-to-use track editor. There's also a happenin' freestyle venue that you can bolster by winning seasons. The sound effects are also quite good, especially after you turn down the token grunge rock and Offspring music. Why designers feel we need to be plowed into submission by headache rock while we race I do not know, but it seems to be par for the course in American game design these days.

The final decision on this one is up to you. If you're looking for a nice-looking, straightforward racer, McGrath 2000 dishes up a quality ride, but if you're looking for that perfect motocross sim coming off of EA or 989's latest, you'll likely want to steer clear. **GR**

▸ GALERIANS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 70

want to harm anyone, yet coincidentally eradicates anyone that stops him from learning about his past. Sadly, most everyone that confides in him ends up meeting an untimely death as well.

The game isn't graphically impressive, but all of the other elements stack up well and quickly. The story and intrigue of what will happen next ultimately kept me playing until the riveting end. **GR**

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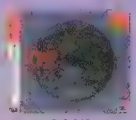
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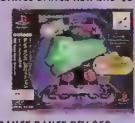
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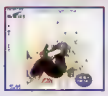
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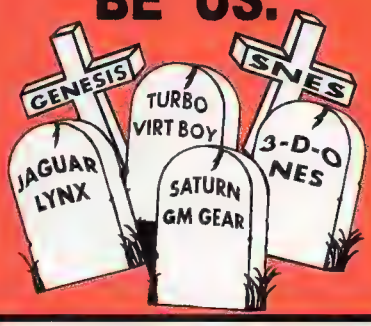

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Now that we've finally come down off the launch high of PlayStation 2, we can't wait for the next kit, namely, Tekken Tag Tournament. After what Namco did with Ridge Racer V on PS2 and Soul Calibur on DC, the anticipation for Tekken is nothing. Of course, man does not live on PlayStation 2 alone, so we're hoping the Tokyo Game Show's host of 148 new titles, including Phantasy Star Online, Eternal Arcadia, Powerstone 2, Grandia, and many other meaty titles for Dreamcast, will be a well-rounded spread. And who knows, maybe Nintendo will come up with a few surprises that will make us forget all about their new uber-controller.

ISSUE #25

NUMBER TWENTY-FIVE

IT'S 2023 A.D.
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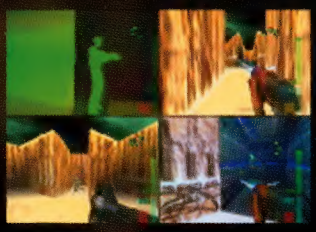

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MATURE
M
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Animated Violence
Animated Blood

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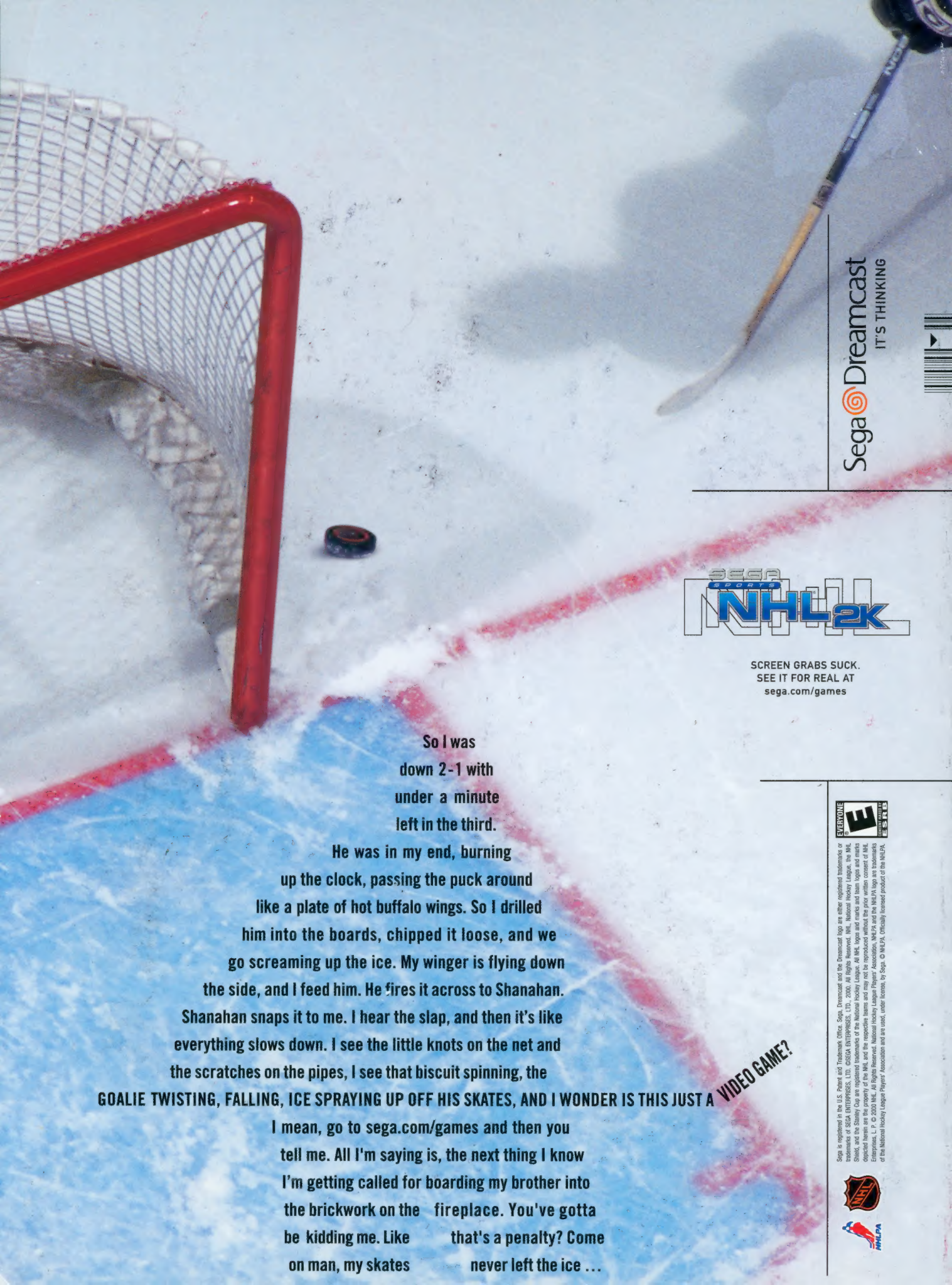

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So I was
down 2-1 with
under a minute
left in the third.
He was in my end, burning
up the clock, passing the puck around
like a plate of hot buffalo wings. So I drilled
him into the boards, chipped it loose, and we
go screaming up the ice. My winger is flying down
the side, and I feed him. He fires it across to Shanahan.
Shanahan snaps it to me. I hear the slap, and then it's like
everything slows down. I see the little knots on the net and
the scratches on the pipes, I see that biscuit spinning, the
GOALIE TWISTING, FALLING, ICE SPRAYING UP OFF HIS SKATES, AND I WONDER IS THIS JUST A VIDEO GAME?
I mean, go to sega.com/games and then you
tell me. All I'm saying is, the next thing I know
I'm getting called for boarding my brother into
the brickwork on the fireplace. You've gotta
be kidding me. Like that's a penalty? Come
on man, my skates never left the ice ...

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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